The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

HERMAN J. ROSSI III

Interviewed by: Peter Eicher

Initial interview date: July 2, 2007



Q: This is July 2, 2007. I'm interviewing Herman Rossi for the oral history program of the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training. This is Peter Eicher interviewing.

Thank you, Herman, for participating. Let's start at the beginning. Tell me where you were born and how you grew up.

ROSSI: OK. Thank you, Peter. I was born in Pensacola, Florida in 1942. My father and mother were not from Florida. The reason they were in Pensacola was that my father was a US Navy fighter pilot, and, as you may know, the main Navy pilot training base was and still is in Pensacola. !942 was of course the first year of America's entry into World War II. My father had been in the Navy about a year before Pearl Harbor and was kept on in Pensacola as an instructor during 1942. He went to the Pacific theater in late 1943 as part of a fighter squadron flying off the carrier Lexington. He had a very distinguished war-time career, earning two Navy Crosses and becoming a fighter ace.

After my father was sent overseas, we left Pensacola in late 1943 so I have no memory of my birthplace. My mother and I returned to my father's home in Wallace, Idaho. Wallace was then the center of a prosperous mining district in northern Idaho. My grandfather, Herman J. Rossi (after whom I am named) had been prominent in business and politics in the area and had served as mayor of Wallace for nearly 20 years. He died in 1937 so I never knew him.

My father came back from the Pacific in '45 and decided to go to law school, so we went down to the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho which is my father and mother's alma mater. We spent three years there. He finished law school and went back to Wallace to practice law. Thus I spent much of my grade school years in Wallace except for a few years in Boise when my father was an assistant United States attorney. During this time, our family grew fairly large as I acquired a sister and three brothers, all younger than myself.

Q: Let me stop you there and go back a little bit. Your father's family came from Idaho. Did your mother's family also come from Idaho?

ROSSI: No. My mother, Fay Hiller Rossi, was from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her father was of German descent and her mother an Irish American. It must have been oil and water because the marriage did not last, and my mother was largely raised by some Irish aunts. My parents met at the University of Idaho where they were both students in the late 1930s.

Anyway in 1954, after returning from Boise, my father decided to enter politics and run for attorney general of Idaho. Our family toured the state with my father as he campaigned which gave me some early exposure to the political arena. However, my father lost the election, and the campaign was also a blow to the family finances. The modest fortune my grandfather had left had not been well managed by my grandmother, and the campaign costs largely finished off what remained.

In 1956, about the time I was starting eighth grade, we moved over to Spokane, Washington, which is some eighty miles west of Wallace and the major city of the area. I spent the next nine years in Spokane, attending Gonzaga Prep School and then Gonzaga University. Both of these schools are run by the Jesuit order. I felt I received an excellent education there which helped me to get into the Foreign Service and to perform once I was in. In particular, the analytical and writing skills I learned from the Jesuits served me well in the Foreign Service.

I attended Gonzaga University from 1960 to 64, graduating with a B.A. in History. My parents had divorced when I was in high school so there was not much money, and I had to largely work my way through college. I was a history major. I had always been interested in history and reading history is still a pleasure rather than work for me. The '60s revolution had not yet reached the Pacific Northwest, particularly Jesuit schools, so it was still a rather conservative and traditional environment I had been in ROTC and at one point had plans to get a commission in the Army. However, the Army discovered that I could not see the big E on the eye chart without my contact lenses and washed me out of ROTC my junior year. When I graduated in '64, I was a bit at loose ends. I had a teaching certificate but was not sure I was cut out to be a teacher so I went to graduate school at Washington State University. This is located some 80 miles south of Spokane. I completed the course work for a Masters degree in history and political science. I took some economics courses, too, which later held me in good stead.

Q: Let me ask you where your interest in foreign affairs came from. Did your family discuss it at the dinner table?

ROSSI: My father would occasionally discuss politics, usually Idaho politics and occasionally national politics, at home but not normally foreign affairs. The exception to this would be his wartime experiences. My interest in international affairs was more of an internal thing. I had a long standing interest in history which expanded into international and current affairs. I was an avid reader from the very early on in my life. I was one of those kids who always have a book in their hands. I read constantly. I remember in the seventh grade reading the ten volumes of the Compton Encyclopedia for entertainment. I think in high school and college I started seriously following international affairs. At Washington State, there was a professor who had been in the Foreign Service. I don't know if he had a full career in the Foreign Service or just got a couple of tours there. He would talk about the Foreign Service in class. I hadn't really known much about the FS up to that point. I had made only a few trips outside the northwest and the family financial situation precluded any international travel. Anyway without great expectations, I took the written Foreign Service exam in late 1964.

Q: This was when you were in graduate school?

ROSSI: This was when I was in graduate school. Lo and behold, I passed the written exam! I was rather surprised because I had been told chances of passing it were very low.

Q: Let me stop you there again and ask you about the foreign service exam and when you took it. Do you remember it?

ROSSI: I do. I don't remember individual questions, but my general impression was it was a test of a liberal education. It was heavy on your knowledge of western civilization. I was also heavy on American culture and history; they also strongly tested your command of the English language. I got the impression in both the written test and the oral that they definitely wanted to see how well the candidate knew the United States - its culture, its government and history. They seemed to be wary of candidates who were deeply into foreign cultures but not very knowledgeable about their own country. I thought the written test was a fair test and that someone with a good liberal education should do well. The written exam has of course been greatly changed since I took it.

In early 1965, I went on to take the oral exam. One of the things that helped me there was that in those days you were required to write in advance an autobiography - eight to ten pages or so. The examiners seemed to really like my autobiography. I don't know quite why. I guess the Jesuits had done a good job teaching us to write.

Q: How was the oral exam conducted?

ROSSI: There was a panel of three examiners. One was a former ambassador and two other Foreign Service officers.

Q: Do you remember what they might have asked you in the oral exam?

ROSSI: They asked me all kinds of stuff. Many questions were on my knowledge of current and international affairs, and where I got that knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, there were also several questions on American history and culture. I remember one question I did know was: Where in the U.S. are the Ute Indians found? The examiners also asked questions about my personal life - my interests and hobbies. They drew on my autobiography extensively for the questions about my background and interests. In retrospect, I felt that they were looking for well-rounded individuals able to connect with other people rather than just excellent scholars. They also wanted to see how well you could express yourself and various subjects. I suspect that some of the questions would be considered "politically incorrect" today but they seemed to be effective in giving the examiners a good picture of the candidate.

Q: Let me stop just a minute and make sure this is coming through clearly.

Q: OK. We were talking about the oral exam. Did they tell you immediately that you had passed?

ROSSI: They sat us down outside. I think I was one of the last they examined. I sat outside for about 45 minutes, maybe an hour, but they said yes, I had passed. That was the winter of 1965. Even after the oral, I was still worried about some medical issues. After my experience with the Army, I was concerned they were not going to let me in because I needed very strong glasses even though my eyes are corrected to 20/20. I also had back surgery not long after the oral exam which added another element of uncertainty. Anyway, I survived the medical tests.

After the oral exam, the medical exams and the security check, they told me that I would be placed on the waiting list, and you may not get into the FS for a year or two. I finished the year of graduate school and, being rather poor, went to work for the Social Security Administration as a trainee. I had understood it would be a year or two before I was called in the Foreign Service (if in fact I was going to get in). I was thus surprised when I received word to report for an incoming FS class starting in October 1965.

Q: How long was it between the time you took the oral and the time you actually entered the service?

ROSSI: I would say about February I took the oral. I came in on October 15, if I remember correctly. So it was six months, seven months. However it was only about three months from the time I was placed on the entry list. It was much faster than I was led to believe. I was shocked when they called me and said, "We want you in Washington, DC in a month."

Q: When you took the exam at that time, did you have to select a specialty?

ROSSI: No. We were all generalists then. This was 1965. This was before the cones. The cones came in about three years later, so we did not have to select a specialty at the time I came in. The only choice was between State and USIA. USIA used the same written and oral exam as State. Within State, there was no cone system then. You were simply a Foreign Service officer (FSO), and the Department assigned you to whatever job there was a need for you. FSOs were expected then to be able to do everything - political, economic, consular, admin - or at least learn to do it very quickly. Of course, as an officer's career progressed, he/she would tend to specialize in one particular area e.g. political, economic, etc. even before cones came in.

It was rather fascinating to see the evolution and change in the Foreign Service over the 28-odd years I was in. There was an incredible amount of change particularly in personnel system. Some of the changes were for the good but a lot more were harmful to the service and to the people in the service. I felt I came in during the final years of the old traditional Foreign Service. There was a tremendous amount of spirit de corps in those days - considerably more than is true today. Officers were willing to work very hard and make major sacrifices for the good of the service. There is a great deal of talk now about mentoring but in the foreign service of 1966 that was the normal thing. Experienced officers regularly helped junior officers and several of my bosses provided me with very valuable help and support. I feel very lucky to have come in at that time and to have seen the service before it gradually lost some of the better qualities it had. Later on, I felt that the greatly increased competition for promotion in the 80s and 90s had a destructive effect which reduced the civility and spirit de corps as most officers had to single-mindedly concentrate on their own promotion prospects. It also reduced independent thinking as officers had to focus almost exclusively on pleasing their immediate superiors. The old Foreign Service was far from perfect but compared to what it became later on, it was, in my view, a lot better!

Q: Tell me about your junior officer class and your training.

ROSSI: I went into the service in October '65. I had just turned 23. I was the second youngest officer in the class. That was going to be a theme through my first tours in the Foreign Service. I was usually the youngest officer at the post even though I had been in for a couple tours. It was clear that when I came in that I hadn't had as broad experience as some of the other officers in my A-100 the class (the starting class for all new FSOs). While I had studied a couple languages, I didn't really speak a foreign language well and had not traveled outside the U.S.

Q: How big was the class?

ROSSI: The class was about 38 - roughly 10% were USIA. I think of the actual State people there were about 32 or something. It was not a big class by today's standards.

Q: All men?

ROSSI: No. I recall we had one lady in the class. She was with USIA. I recall also there was a strong link between the FS and the Ivy League schools in those days. A fair percentage of the class went to Ivy League universities even if they had come from other parts of the country.

That period was early in the Vietnam War, and the draft was going on. A number of the incoming FSOs had been military officers at one point or another, so we had about a third of the class that had already spent a couple of years in the military and were older. I think the average age of the class was about 26 when I came in which is actually rather young compared to classes of only a few years later. This was early in the Vietnam War. The U.S. was involved there but not as deeply as later on. In retrospect, I was young, enthusiastic, and comparatively inexperienced.. It was all very invigorating and fascinating then.

Q: The junior officer class, do you remember it?

ROSSI: We had a lot of lectures from various people around the State Departments and from other Departments involved in foreign affairs. Some were interesting, some less so. In retrospect, a number of the speakers assumed more knowledge of the workings of the department's bureaucracy than I had and I think a number of us had.

We did a little bit of travel in the class. We went to New York to an international bank. We went to Baltimore for a company that produced dredges. We had lectures at Commerce Dept, Treasury and some other government agencies. It was very concentrated. I remember that. I think it was very helpful. I could probably have gotten more out of it than I did. The managers of the course were making a good faith effort to try to brief us on a rather complicated system and career in a relatively brief period of time. Only some of it took. Forty years later, I see areas which could have been added or deleted or changed to improve our preparation. I recall there were a couple lectures in the Dept's Retirement Seminar that I wish had been in the A-100 course. However, we only fully learn the Foreign Service by serving a few tours overseas, as you know.

Q: Did you get your first assignment right at the end of your class?

ROSSI: Yes, I did. I was assigned to Kinshasa in the Congo. I had been very general in my assignments request. I could have been more specific but I doubt it would have made much difference.

Q: They didn't give you a specific list of posts?

ROSSI: No, they did not do that in those days. There was no open assignments system. You could request a particular country or area but you did not really know what was coming available.

Out of the A-100 course, I went to a consular course and then went into French language training. French is the official language in the Congo, since it was a former Belgian colony. The name of the country has been changed a couple times.

Q: What was it at that time?

ROSSI: When I got there, it was the Congo, specifically the Democratic Republic of the Congo. President Mobutu changed it to Zaire in the early '70s' as part of his program of Africanization. I'll talk about that later on. It nearly destroyed the economy. The name of the country was changed back to the Democratic Republic of the Congo after Mobutu was overthrown in the 1990s.

I had a consular course and started a French language course, and I got married. I had dated and was semi-engaged to a wonderful lady, Mary MacFarlane, pretty much through my college career. We broke up at stages and got back together then got married a few weeks after I started language training.

Q: How did she feel about the assignment to the reassignment to the Congo?

ROSSI: She didn't express great reservations about it. She probably would have preferred to go to Europe or something like that. Her mother certainly would have preferred that we went to Europe. When we finally did get to Europe a couple of tours later, my mother-in-law looked on it as a great promotion that I'd finally been accepted in the Foreign Service.

One of the things they stressed to you in those days was that you would go where you were assigned, especially in your early tours. It was a much more disciplined system then. There no negotiation of assignments and, except for medical issues, little prospect of successful appeal of assignments at the junior level. We had an officer in our course whose name I don't recall, but who spoke fluent French and had good Arabic, having studied in Lebanon for a couple of years. He wanted to go to a middle-eastern country. They sent him to London. Most of us saw this as a message that we should not get used to getting our first choices on assignment, especially as a junior officer. In later tours, your preferences seemed to carry more weight. .

Q: What was your reaction to your assignment in Kinshasa?

ROSSI: I didn't mind it. I knew it was a Third World country, and I also knew there was a civil war going on there and there had been a lot of political turmoil in the Congo since independence in 60. It seemed like an interesting place to work. That was my strongest reaction - it sounded like a very interesting place to work. I had heard stories about young officers who had been sent to nice European consulates and then found things were very quiet. Kinshasa sounded like a place where the action was which was certainly true.

Q: How did you get to Kinshasa in those days? Was that the Pan Am flight?

ROSSI: That was my one old Foreign Service voyage to post. We took the USS Independence from New York to Lisbon which was the one time I got to take a ship to post. That faded out, too, shortly thereafter. We laid over in Lisbon for a day or so and then took a Pan Am clipper going from Lisbon down to Monrovia. We got off in Monrovia and then spent a day in Monrovia waiting for another Pan Am flight that came through and hop scotched down the coast of Africa to Kinshasa. In those days, Kinshasa looked a lot better physically than Monrovia. I subsequently served in Monrovia. It was and still is a rather shabby looking town; it did not have a colonial power to build wide boulevards and monumental buildings and install an urban infrastructure.

By comparison, Kinshasa was much more physically impressive. It was fraying at the edges, but it definitely was a more interesting and better looking place. We got to Kinshasa in May of '66. It was a fascinating country at the time. There had been a lot of political turbulence as everyone knows after its independence in '60. Just before I got there, there had been a civil war in which the western-backed government, such as it was, was fighting the Simba rebels who were backed by to some degree by the Chinese communists and a various other eastern bloc countries. That was the height of the Cold War.

I got there in May '66. This was a year and a half after the liberation of Stanleyville. If you recall, the Simba rebels had taken Stanleyville, the main city in the northeastern part of the country (now called Kisangani), in 1964. In the process, a number of Americans, mostly missionaries, were taken hostages and held in the city. The hostages included the American consul. They were held there for a couple of months, and a relief effort was launched, partly made of Belgium paratroops and partly of white mercenaries. The operation was successful and most of the hostages were freed although a few were killed by the Simbas as the Belgian troops approached. When I got to the Congo, the civil war was in its final months. The rebels had been driven out of the towns and cities were largely just holding on in the jungle but even that was tapering down.

I found the Congo is a fascinating place, particularly at that time. It was sort of a mini-Vietnam in that it had become a focus of cold war competition in Africa. The West was supporting one side, the Mobutu government, while the Soviet bloc supported various rebel groups. The size of the country, the weakness and corruption of the Mobutu government, and chronic discontent in the eastern part of the country meant that it was chronically instable and a fertile ground for rebellion and subversion. At that time, there was a widely accepted theory on both sides of the cold war that the size, resources, and central location of the Congo made it the key to dominating or at least heavily influencing all of Africa.

The U.S. was heavily involved in supporting the Mobutu government in many ways. There was a large assistance program run by a large A.I.D mission, a military assistance mission, and even some USAF transports to fly the Congolese army to trouble spots around the country. We never put combat troops there but did about everything short of that. The Embassy was quite large and functioned in a constant crisis mode.

The Congolese army was fairly incompetent at that time and had been unable to stop the advance of the Simbas rebels in 1964 even with US and Belgian assistance. There seemed nothing that could stop the Simbas from taking Kinshasa. The two groups which had turned the tide of battle were the white mercenaries and the Katangan gendarmes. In the desperate days of 1964, Moise Tshombe had been brought back into the government as Prime Minister. He had been the leader of the copper-rich province of Katanga which had broken away in 1960-63. That succession had been suppressed by the UN, troops but Tshombe still had some Katangan soldiers in Angola. Anyway, he brought back with him six hundred or so Katangan gendarmes. They were good fighters - better than the Congolese army. At the same time, he also brought in mercenaries. The first group was the Fifth Commando, an English-speaking unit led by Mike Hoare, a South African.

Over the course of 1964-65, the mercenaries and the Katangan gendarmes were successful in defeating the Simbas. These two fascinating military units were still in the northeastern Congo when I arrived in 1966. However their situation and become precarious because six months earlier, the commander of the Congolese army, Joseph Mobutu, had staged a military coup and overthrew Tshombe's government. Mobutu did not trust either the mercenaries or the Katangan troops (and the feeling was mutual) but for a while a least he still needed them. However by the time I arrived in mid-1966, this need had diminished and the confrontations came during my tour.

Q: This was Joseph Mobutu at that time?

ROSSI: Yes. It was still Joseph Desire Mobutu. He changed his name later on to Mobutu Sese Seko as part of his Aficanization campaign in the early 70's. I had to follow it more than I wanted to because when I left Kinshasa I spent two years on the Congo desk in Washington. We'll get to that later on. It was still Joseph Desire Mobutu. The war was still going on. He was still being more of a moderate than he was before.

The first summer I was there (1966), the Katangan gendarmes in and around Stanleyville decided they wanted to go back to Katanga. Mobutu's government did not want them back there because they were afraid they would start a new secession. One large group of Katangan gendarmes revolted and started marching south. They were eventually corralled with the heavy use of air power and cut off from Katanga. Some of them were captured, but a lot of them ended up with a mercenary named Jean Schramme. He was one of those fascinating characters you found in the Congo. He had been a Belgian planter who had become a mercenary and leader of small force in the course of the civil war. He had a stronghold south of Stanleyville (Kisangani) and some of the refugee Katangan troops ended up with him.

My second summer in the Congo, the mercenaries from the Sixth commando in Kisangani and Schramme's mercenary/Katangan force all revolted. The Sixth Commando was a French speaking unit; Mike Hoare's unit had been disbanded and had left the country by this time. There were various Congolese army units in Kisangani also but they were driven out of the city by the mercenaries. The army harassed them from the outskirts of Kisangani, but they couldn't defeat the mercenaries. The mercenaries were in an untenable position, however, because they didn't have any source of supplies. Thus they retreated southwards first to Schramme's stronghold and then moved east into Bukavu, which is a major town near the eastern border of the Congo. The mercenaries/Katangans held that city for three or four months until lack of supplies, air attacks by government planes piloted by expatriates and other things caused them to go into the neighboring country of Rwanda and be interned there. The white mercenaries eventually got back to Europe. However, the Katangan gendarmes were turned over to the Congolese government. A few were executed and the rest were left to die in prison camps in the jungle. I always felt sorry for them since they were doing their duty as they say it.

Q: What were you personally doing during while all this was happening.

ROSSI: There was a system then in the Foreign Service of junior officer rotation, and it was still working when I came in. A first-tour officer would rotate from section to section around the embassy. Kinshasa was quite a big embassy so there was lots of opportunity for this.

Anyway, I rotated around the embassy. My first five months were in the economic/ commercial section. It was quite interesting. I enjoyed that work and eventually ended up in the economic cone. From there I went to the administrative section. I found out I was not cut out to be an admin officer! That was good. I was learning what I wanted and what didn't want and what I was good at and not good at. It was and is very necessary work; I just did not feel I was cut out to be a good admin officer.

Q: We'll step back a little bit. I think the last intelligible portion of our conversation, we had just finished up as administrative trainee junior officer, and we're moving on to the ambassador's office. You're going to tell us who the ambassador was and what you were doing there.

ROSSI: The ambassador when I arrived in the Congo was Mac Godley, who was quite an impressive figure. He was a big bear of a man who had been in the Congo as DCM a couple of years earlier. He knew the place very well, knew all the people very well. He was a very good guy to work for. He had been deeply involved in the post-1960 U.S. relations with Congo and was very knowledgeable. He had led the embassy through the Stanleyville hostage period.

Just before I became the Ambassador's aide, Mac Godley and Mobutu got into a disagreement. Mobutu could be very mercurial and irascible at times. He wanted to make a friend with the American ambassador but at the same time he didn't want any hard advice. Of course, we were pouring huge amounts of money and other things into the Congo to support Mobutu, so we felt we had some rights to give him some strong advice. He really didn't take this well. After one particular disagreement, Mobutu ordered Godley to leave the country. One reason Mobutu felt able to throw the American ambassador out when he was getting so much U.S. aid was that he had another channel of communication to the U.S. government. However, I am not able to discuss the details of that in an unclassified document.

That was shortly before I became the ambassador's aide. Robert O. Blake, who was the DCM, became the Chargï¿½ d'Affaires for about the next nine months. Thus I worked for him during my time in the front office.

In the period prior my tour in the front office, I had been able to do some traveling around the country. I had gotten up to Stanleyville (Kisangani) and to Lubumbashi in the copper region. I also visited Albertville which was the headquarters of the Fifth Commando which was then in its final months in the Congo. I met some of the mercenaries; they were a fascinating and rather diverse group, not all thugs as you might expect but a mixture of young men looking for adventure and others looking for a stake to buy a pub somewhere. Of course, there were a few thugs too.

A few months after I became ambassador's aide, the mercenaries of the Sixth Commando in Kisangani revolted. The mercenary revolt was a very traumatic experience all over the country, not just up in the northeast. In Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and elsewhere, the Congolese army, which was never well disciplined, reacted to the revolt by directing their suspicion and animosity toward all whites in general. White civilians were hauled out of their cars at army roadblocks. Some were let go, some were beaten up and some were arrested. In Katanga, several civilian expatriates were actually killed. It was quite dangerous all over the Congo for all whites for several months. The anger was not directed at Americans. If you could persuade the soldiers that you were an American, you were probably all right. The problem was that relatively few of the soldiers spoke French. They spoke Lingala which is the trading language of the western Congo. Not infrequently, they had been drinking while manning these road blocks. There were a number of rather hair-raising passages through army roadblocks for all Embassy staff during that period including my wife and I.

From the American government's point of view, it was a very much a crisis period over the next few months after the mercenaries revolted. The U.S. was deeply involved in helping Mobutu's government defeat the mercenaries and Katangese. It was fascinating time to be an Ambassador's aide as I got to see crisis management close up. Bob Blake reveled in crisis management.

Q: Did find that to be a static job? Did you stay in the Embassy and hold the fort or were you out and about town with him as well?

ROSSI: I was not out and about town with Blake. He liked to handle everything personally. I stayed more towards the office and manned the fort while he rushed from one meeting to another.

I did various jobs to support and assist Blake, classic staff aide stuff. Because Blake and I were the only ones in the front office with decent French, I arranged many of his high level contacts including with Mobutu. I also remember that was one of my jobs was to write what was called the Weeka. It was a weekly summary of all the important events in the country for that week. It was mainly useful for those people in the Washington bureaucracy who were not following the Congo on a daily basis. There was plenty of grist for the mill. During the mercenary revolt, there was almost too much grist.

After the six months as Ambassador's aide, I had been scheduled to go to Bukavu. A junior officer would normally rotate around the embassy for 18 months and then for the last six months would go to the consulate in Bukavu. The problem was at this stage of the game, Bukavu was held by the mercenaries so obviously I could not go there. Thus the Embassy sent me over to USIS. I spent some five months there which I found valuable as an insight into another agency at post.

After the mercenary rebellion was over and things had become quieter, we had a number of high level visits. Hubert Humphrey was then Vice President and came to the Congo with a large entourage. It was the first of many high level visits I was been involved in. He also brought a large press contingent which I helped look after in my USIS role.

Q: You escaped having to do consular work?

ROSSI: No, not really. Normally consular was not a first-tour rotation. Kinshasa had a one-man consular section, and consular work was relatively limited. However, the consular officer was transferred away on short notice so I spent the last three months being the consular officer there. It was not the best situation because while I had had the consular course, I was inexperienced in consular work. However I had to learn fast since I was the entire consular section and the cases we did have always seemed to be tough ones. (Everything seemed to be harder in the Congo than elsewhere.) There were a surprising number of immigrant visa cases there. There were a thousand or so contact teachers from Haiti, who were trying to get to the US on immigrant visas, which formed the bulk of this work.

We left the Congo in April of '68 as I recall.

Q: Before we move on to the next question, I'd like to ask you about life outside the professional aspects. Did you have good housing? Did you meet a lot of Congolese? Did you make friends with them and other diplomats?

ROSSI: Let's talk about housing. We were first in an apartment downtown; then we were able to finagle a small house up in the hills on the edge of town, an area called Djelo Binza. Housing was okay. The problem was the infrastructure in the whole city was decaying rapidly and was not being maintained. The electricity and water and things like that were frequently going out.

Also, the availability of food was unreliable. Various foods would come in for a while and then vanish. I'm certain this was far harder on wives than it was on officers. The officers had all the excitement going on at the office. It was tough to live in Kinshasa in those days, but there was a great esprit de corps among the whole American community including the spouses. They'd help each other out.

I remember in those days the embassy would only air condition occupied bedrooms. The climate in Kinshasa ranged from hot to oppressively hot and humid - the later being some six months of the year. I remember one occasion when had a few expatriate friends over for dinner. We started the dinner party in the dining room in the normal manner. However it was so hot and muggy that we actually moved the dinner party into the bedroom and the air conditioning! We would of course not do that for a representational dinner. We and our guests just endured; the heat of course bothered our Congolese guests far less.

It was hard to get the Congolese to come out for diners. Many had transportation problems, and I lived well away from the city center. Also I didn't have much in the way of representational funds. I learned that lunches at restaurants were normally the best but that ate up what little representation money I had. The more senior officers were obviously more active on representational functions than I was, and I attended many functions of at their homes.

There was little outside entertainment in the Congo then so the American and other foreign community tended to pull together and entertain each other. I made some good friends among the expatriate community particularly the British and German embassies. I have lost track of them, but still consider them friends.

In October 1967, about eight months before our departure, my first son, Christopher, was born.

Q: Was he born in the Congo?

ROSSI: Yes. My wife Mary could have gone up to Germany, but she wanted to stay there. She had natural childbirth in a hospital with some Belgian nuns. It was a very long painful labor. After that, she got seriously into natural childbirth training. This story is a little bit down the road, but she actually later became a nurse-midwife.

Q: In '66 to '68 the big issue in U.S. foreign policy was in Vietnam probably. Did that have any impact on you at all in the Congo?

ROSSI: Not really. The Dept was looking for volunteers for Vietnam by 1967, and they were dragooning some officers. A few officers from my A-100 course eventually went to Vietnam. One or two volunteered and a couple of others went less willingly. The big push on Vietnam came around 67-68 but by then I was married with a child on the way and the Dept was not forcing married officers with children to go to Vietnam.

Q: Politically, was Vietnam an issue at all in the Congo?

ROSSI: No, it was not really an issue. It was considered just another part of the battle the Western countries were fighting in the Congo against the worldwide communist movement. We had been supporting the government against the communist-backed rebels in the Congo, and Vietnam seemed just another example of communist rebels trying to overthrow a democratic government on a bigger scale. I did not hear a single Congolese criticize our Vietnam policy during my tour; some of the Europeans expats occasionally questioned the war but they were not being particularly vocal about it.

Q: In '68 you went back to the States?

Yes. I am afraid I have spent a lot of time on the Congo but it was the most politically active and complex of my many tours. I will try and keep the others shorter. One personal footnote is that we left the Congo in the nick of time in one respect. I had acquired a used MG Midget just before I entered the FS (a young man's yen for a sporty car). It was our only car in Kinshasa. It was a fun car to drive up the curving, hilly roads to our house but it had very little room inside it. By our departure, our son was six months old and growing fast. We could barely get the three of us in the car when we left.

Anyway we left the Congo in April, early May of '68, and I had been assigned to the Congo desk in Washington at the Central African Affairs office ( AFC). It turned out to be a difficult tour because junior officers did not get paid very much in those days (around $7,000 a year), and living in Washington was rather expensive even then. So, we were relatively poor in the two and a half years we spent in Washington.

It was also the period my other three children were born. I ended up having another son about six months after I got there, and then the twins were born another two years later. The twins were born toward the end of the tour, so we had three children in a little over two and a half years in Washington. My wife was of course not working because of the small children. We did not get the overseas housing allowance in Washington and, for a junior officer with a growing family, that was the difference between a decent standard of living and near poverty.

The financial difficulties of living in Washington made such a strong impact on me and my wife that we did not come back to Washington for 10 years after that tour. It was however rather interesting to work on a country desk. It's the heart and soul of the State Department, and everybody comes to you who needs anything relating to your country.

In retrospect, it would have better to do that Washington tour two to four years later when I was a little more knowledgeable on the bureaucracy and in better financial shape. I had to learn the ins and outs of a rather complex bureaucracy in a short period. I spent a lot of time writing briefing papers.

My period on the desk was a time when the Congo had become much quieter politically. The assumption around the U.S. government was that the political problems were over, and therefore the intrinsic economic strength of the Congo would come to the fore. Copper prices were good, and it was thought that the plantation agriculture of the colonial period would recover, and the Congo would again be a prosperous country.

Of course, that didn't happen. Mobutu badly mismanaged the economy. He started out by nationalizing the vital copper industry and later on "Africanized" many more industries (e.g. forced the foreign owners to sell all or part of their companies to Congolese for little or no money). This policy got going in earnest after I left the desk but I spent a lot of time dealing with Mobutu's nationalization of the main Belgian copper company, UMHK. After I left the desk, he nationalized many more companies. Not surprisingly the economy of the Congo went into a nosedive before long but in the period I was on the desk (1968-70), there for still a lot of hope the country.

It was also shortly after my tour in AF/C that Mobutu changed the name of the country from Congo to Zaire and then pressured all Congolese to change their names from a Christian name to an African one. Mobutu changed his own name at this time. Also Congolese were not to call each other Monsieur or Madame but citoyene (citizen). Mobutu had been a student in Belgium at one point, and I think he must have been fascinated by the French revolution.

This was also the one time that I actually got to participate in a White House visit. Nixon was president, and Mobutu came in mid 1970 for a State Visit. I worked like a dog and did a lot of briefing papers which were still reflecting the party line that with the Congo's political troubles behind it, the country had great promise economically. They were rather optimistic briefing papers but in fairness most of us thought the Congo had a better economic future than turned out to be the case.

As one of the working stiffs on the State Visit, I was invited for the after-dinner entertainment for the White House state dinner. After the dinner, we were allowed to join the main group for the entertainment and dancing. My wife came with me. She was about seven months pregnant with twins at the time-we didn't know they were twins-but we both had a good time. That was our one opportunity to actually to attend a state visit in the White House. That was also my one chance to actually talk to Mobutu in person. That was my two plus years at AF/C. In retrospect, I didn't find it enjoyable because of the financial strain, but I did learn a lot about the operation of the Washington bureaucracy.

Q: Clearly, Congo was still a country of some interest then.

ROSSI: Very definitely. It was probably the major foreign policy issue in Africa. Africa has never been high on the U.S. foreign policy agenda, but of the African issues, the Congo was at the top or near the top. We invested a lot of money and manpower in establishing stability in the country. We kept on pouring in money to support Mobutu and the country long after I left the desk. The country was never economically successful but for many years it was at least relatively stable and pro-western.

One item I would mention on my Washington tour was this was the first time I was exposed to the 60s revolution in the U.S. It was a bit of a cultural shock. I was rather traditional in my views, and I did not agree with the anti-war protesters or many other aspects of the 60s revolution.

Somewhere early in my Washington tour, the Foreign Service decided that every officer must chose a cone to specialize in for their Foreign Service work. There had been informal specializations before but now it was to become formal. There were four choices - political, economic, consular, and administration - much like today. I had found my work in the economics section in Kinshasa challenging or interesting, so I put in for the economic cone, and they took me. My economic background was somewhat thin. I had taken some economic courses, but it wasn't very extensive. Thus when I finished my tour in AFC, I went to the Foreign Service Institute's six month economic course.

Q: Let me stop you and ask how the cone system worked at the time, if you can remember. You started in the foreign service in the specialty you wanted or some mysterious process assigned people to different ones?

ROSSI: Well, you have to remember that I was already in the Foreign Service when cones were officially introduced. We did not start in any specific cone. It was an informal assignment system based in large degree on the officer's reputation. Then as now, political jobs were the most sought after and competitive. I will admit I was not in the old system long enough to get a good feel for how it worked on assignments beyond the junior officer level. When cones came in, you applied for two cones - first preference and second preference. I got my first preference in part because we had a shortage of academically-trained economic officers. Thereafter incoming officers had to pick a cone when they entered. These days, I do occasional work for the Board of Examiners of the FS, and I see that candidates have to select a cone when they take the exam.

Q: So you got the six month training course?

ROSSI: I got the six-month training course in late, second half, of 1970. It was rigorous and exhausting. It was more exhausting because my twins were born part way through that course and we were in a very small apartment. Six people living in a two bedroom apartment including four children was tough. It was, of course, even tougher on my wife than it was on me.

The course was interesting. It was designed to give us the equivalent of an undergraduate major in economics in a rather short time. Based on the GRE test results, they succeeded quite well. Math was the hardest part of course. Most of us had not had much math and by that time, math had become an important part of the study of economics. The instructors did a good job of gradually getting us into the higher level of math needed. I did reasonably well in the course; I think I scored in the middle of the class. Interestingly I did not need most of the math I was taught because most of my subsequent foreign service work was in third world countries where economic models were not really very useful

During the course, I had been assigned to Malawi.

Q: Did you choose that?

ROSSI: Sort of, yes I did. I'd gotten to know the personnel officer. I originally had been going to Kabul. However someone a little more senior who had worked in the secretariat said he wanted Kabul, so he got the position. I looked at what's left, and Malawi seemed to be the best. It turned out to be a very good choice. Malawi, with four small children, was good because you could get household help inexpensively there.

It occurs to me my kids will be mad at me if I do this narrative of my career and not mention all their names since they were with me through many of my posts. So my wife and I arrived in Malawi with my sons Christopher, Edward and Michael and my daughter Marianne. As I mentioned, Michael and Marianne are twins. At the time we arrived in Malawi, the twins were about four months old and all the children were under four years old.

Compared to the Congo, Malawi was a fairly congenial place to live. The capital, Blantyre, was on plateau about 3500 feet, so it was not as hot as some of the other places. Hastings Banda, the President/dictator ruled Malawi with an iron hand but, unlike Mobutu, he had a fair amount of economic sense so the economy and the infrastructure ran fairly well. Of course, the country had never had the political upheavals and civil wars which had marked the Congo. Malawi was and is a poor country but then it was surprisingly well managed. Later on, Banda started to lose some of his economic good sense as he got older and the weight of absolute power started to corrupt him but during my tour the country still ran well.

Malawi wasn't a wealthy country at all. It was a lot of small farmers and some tobacco and tea plantations, and a few things like that which were run by expatriates, British mainly with a few Rhodesians. However it was a far cry from the Congo in stability, order and infrastructure.

Q: But Banda was also a dictator?

ROSSI: That's right. Banda was an absolute dictator. Almost all my African tours were in countries run by dictators of various types. Banda was older when he came to power. He left the economy to some degree alone, but he was becoming-particularly the last part of my tour-more erratic on the political side. People were being arrested for no good reason, including civil servants who I had dealt with. Someone with a grudge would carry a story back to Banda that some civil servant had said something against him. That's all it took. The person just vanished into prison and perhaps never to be seen again.

Thus I remember Malawi as a beautiful country with wonderful people but one where the political situation left a bad taste in my mouth. It was a lesson for me in the kind of abuse which an absolute dictatorship is capable of, particularly the unpredictability and lack of any real rule of law. On the other hand, if you were an American diplomat, it could be a congenial place. The Embassy had a house on Lake Malawi. It also had a small house on Zomba plateau which was one of the higher plateaus (6500ft) where the British had planted pine forests. It resembled in some ways a forest in our Pacific northwest. Both the lake house and the Zomba house could be used by Embassy personnel in rotation.

It was very different from Kinshasa in that it was a very small embassy. We only had ten or so Americans and only about five State officers, including the ambassador. We had no marines. We had a Peace Corps contingent. We had no AID mission. AID had pulled out of Malawi. They had a policy then of concentrating on the larger countries. We still had a couple aid projects but no AID personnel. As I mentioned, Malawi was a very poor country but what wealth existed was fairly well spread around. Maize was the main staple of the country. Almost no one was starving.

I made a number of Malawian friends, something that had been more difficult in the Congo. Many of these Malawians were from the northern region who seemed to be the best educated Malawians. The north is where the missionaries had worked most intensively and thus became the best educated. However the down side of this was that Banda seemed to have a special resentment again civil servants from the northern region. Thus the northerners, many of whom I knew well, were taking the brunt of Banda's arbitrary arrests, firings and demotions. None of them were plotting against the regime or anything like that. Banda just did not trust northerners.

Banda was pro-Western, but was becoming more suspicious and paranoid as he got older. Nevertheless, I remember the Malawians as probably the friendliest, hardest-working and most intelligent people I met in Africa

Q: And you were the economic officer?

ROSSI: I was the single economic/political officer. In other words, I did all the economic and political work which the Ambassador and DCM did not want to handle. In practice, I did a lot more economic than political work. I also did the consular work part time for the most of my tour. I was jack of all trades. It was fascinating from that point of view. Unlike the Congo, Malawi did not rank very high on the U.S. foreign policy spectrum, even in the Africa bureau, so we were left alone for one thing. We didn't get many resources, either.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ROSSI: William Burdett. He was not an Africa hand. He came out of EUR and previously had been DCM at Ankara. I recall him as a true gentleman - more typical of the old school Foreign Service. He was very helpful to me in my work, and he and his wife were very good to my family.

I'm trying to think of the two DCM's during my tour. John Buche was the first and Jim Farber was the second DCM. Both of them were Africa hands and were real gentlemen; they were both a pleasure to work for. Both they and their wives went out of their way to help me and my family. I had lots of little kids, so I needed more support than would normally be the case. I have fond memories of the whole staff at Blantyre.

It was a congenial tour except for the bad taste left by Banda and his increasingly authoritarian ways.

Q: This was a two year tour?

ROSSI: It was a two year tour. The next tour I was assigned to Rome. In order to go to Rome, I had to take the Italian course at FSI. Even though I have an Italian name, my father was far removed from his partial Italian/Swiss ancestry and neither of my parents spoke any foreign language.

Q: Were you choosing assignments at this point?

ROSSI: No, I wasn't. We were still submitting our general preferences. We were not choosing assignments; we did not know what assignments were coming open. In those days, there was an office in personnel that handled junior officer assignments. I think I was still an old FSO-05 (now 03). I hadn't completed my third tour yet. I was still under the junior officer control, and they decided (probably rightly) that I needed some non-African experience because I had been twice in Africa and once on an African desk.

My assignment to Rome involved six months of language training in Washington, so my wife and children went to stay with my wife's parents in California. I found I rather enjoyed studying the Italian language and still consider it the most beautiful European language.

Q: Today is July 27, 2007. This is a continuation of the interview of Herman Rossi. Herman, we left off last time, you had just been assigned to Italy and were returning to the United States for language training.

ROSSI: Right. I had six months of Italian language training. While I was in language training my wife and small children went with my wife's parents in Newport Beach. In August of 1973, we all arrived in Rome which is well known as the dead season in Rome. August is when the Romans (and Parisians) leave the cities for a month-long vacation. I arrived in a city that was very quiet and uncongested. I didn't realize this was not the real world.

Q: Today if you go to Rome in July or August, it is so full of tourists you can barely move. Was it the same then?

ROSSI: No. There were tourists there but not as many as there are now. Also, the tourists tend to stay in a certain areas, and if you got out of the tourist area into the residential areas, it got very quiet very quickly. More than half the stores particularly out of the tourist area are closed for August. Traffic was relatively light for Rome. I found August a pleasant time to stay in Rome. In the old days, epidemics would break out in the summertime. That was true in the U.S., too. Anyone, who had any money, got out of the big cities for the summertime because they were unhealthy places.

That tradition has played through. Unlike Americans, who stagger their vacations, the Italians (and the French) all want to take their vacation at one time. It's a prestige thing. You're expected to be gone in August. There are stories of people who fell on financial hard times and couldn't afford to go away for August so they shuttered up their apartments and hid their car to make it look like they had gone so they didn't lose face with their neighbors. Just one of the many Italian stories I heard.

Italy was my only European post. It was a fascinating place. Rome is a very big and, except for August, a very congested city. Roman-Italian culture is fascinating. Although I have an Italian name, I'm only a small part Italian and even that was filtered through Switzerland. I had to learn to re-pronounce my own name from "Rossi" (as in the Scottish Ross) to "Rrrow-si" because the Italians couldn't understand if I pronounced it the American way..

There are no perfect Foreign Service posts and Rome was no exception. The good points were a fascinating culture and history which I had studied and was fairly knowledgeable about. The people are cultured, dynamic and interesting. Of course, the food and wine were great; the best I ever had and both were rather reasonable at the time I was there. The downside is that Rome is not a particularly good place to raise small children. The city is very congested. The Embassy-owned apartment building where we lived had very little play space for kids and the city itself is rather deficient in parks.

It seems there are no quiet times in Italy, and my three years there was no exception. There were major strikes, frequent changes of government but through it all the country and the people carried on as usual. The terrorism problem was still in its early stages and did not reach its peak until the late 70's after we had left.

My job in the embassy was as a commercial officer; I had done some commercial work in the African posts I had been assigned to, but this was the first time I had done it full time. This was also back to the period before the Foreign Commercial Service came into being. The embassy had a commercial section under the minister-counselor for economic-commercial affairs. There was an economic section and a commercial section, so I was doing commercial work. I am afraid I would have to add the nature of my work to the negative side of my Rome experience. I much preferred economic work and did not find commercial work as satisfying.

One other good side of the tour was that my wife had been a student in Florence, at Gonzaga University in Florence, so she knew Florence the way a student does. Rome was so congested, and Florence was really a nice change. Thus we would try and get up to Florence whenever we could. Sometime we took the kids but more often we would leave them with the au pair for a weekend to get away. Florence, outside the summer tourist season, is quite a congenial city.

Florentines are cultured and very courteous; this last is not a quality which comes immediately to mind in speaking of the Romans. I found with the Italian I learned at FSI, I could understand the people on the streets in Florence because that's where standard Italian comes from. I often could not understand two Romans speaking together because they would be speaking in Roman dialect.

Driving in Rome was a real acquired taste. It is extraordinarily difficult due to the combination of far too much traffic for the narrow winding streets and the Italian competitive driving approach. Every Roman male seems to think he is Mario Andretti. However I learned to cope and, while I never drove as aggressively as the Romans, I eventually found I could hold my own.

You had four kids by this time?

ROSSI: We had four kids. As I mentioned, Rome was not a great post for small children. It is apartment living, the city is congested and has relatively few parks per capita. We probably hit Rome at a bad time in our lives. If the kids had been older or if we had hit in before we had the kids, it would have been better. There's a lot to see and do in Rome and the Italian countryside, very historic and cultural, but the facilities for children were very limited.

The housing was adequate although not roomy, but it was apartment living, and the outside play-area for the children was very small. Thus we were not very happy with the situation for the kids there, but for the adults, it was a magnificent place. I came to love the Italian language. It is a beautiful language that flows off the tongue. I much preferred it to French.

Q: I need to interject here because you can't see it on the tape, but as soon as you started talking about the Italian language, you started gesturing with your hands.

ROSSI: Right! That 15% or so Italian blood comes out, or maybe it's just my memories of Italy talking. I still do that to some degree. It's amazing. Italy was a fun place, and its culture has its quirks, but they're fun quirks.

Italy has this concept of bella figura which is the image you present to the outside world: your dress, the way you speak, the way you behave, the whole package. It's important in every culture, but it's especially important in the Italian culture. Dress is very important.

One of my Italian stories is when I first got to Rome, there was a little kiosk about a block away from our apartment that sold newspapers. On Saturday and Sunday, I put on my sweatshirt and jeans and went down to the kiosk to buy a newspaper or two. Everybody else there I noticed were in sports jackets and things like this. No problem. They were friendly, but I clearly stood out as a foreigner. After a few months, I got tired of standing out as the foreigner, so I started putting on slacks and decent sweater and went down to buy my newspapers. I found I preferred to blend into local culture.

I got to like the amount of care the Italians put into their appearance. When I got back to the States, it was a bit of a shock to be reminded how casual (sometimes even sloppy) people dress here when going out. Even the Kennedy Center seems to get its share of jeans and tee shirts.

Again there were good points and bad points about our Rome tour. We made some good friends there. It was much more of a nine-to-five job than the jobs in Africa had been because the diplomatic social life there is mainly for the more senior Embassy officers. It was a very big embassy, probably 100 Americans on the diplomatic list there and many, many agencies. It was a good education to see a big embassy at work, dozens of different agencies.

Q: Were you at the office of the beautiful embassy on the Via Veneto?

ROSSI: Yes. That was one of the great things about working in Rome. The Embassy was in an historic villa, which had belonged to an old noble family. It's right on the Via Veneto, a beautiful place. The piano nobile which is the second floor in Italian buildings-big, important Italian buildings-was the floor where the noble family would live. That's where the ambassador, DCM and political section had their offices. The tapestries on that floor were incredible. The ceilings were about 13' high. Absolutely beautiful! It was almost a pleasure being duty officer there because you spent Saturday morning in the Ambassador's suite.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ROSSI: John Volpe was the ambassador. He was a political appointee as most of the U.S. ambassadors in Italy are. He had been governor of Massachusetts. He arrived a little bit before I got there. I didn't have many dealings with him. I was well down the totem pole from him. I'd see him once in a while at receptions or things like that, although I do remember that I was the duty officer the day that Nixon formally resigned, so I had to take him the cable advising of the resignation. But I didn't know him very well. He seemed congenial to the extent that I had any contact with him, a pleasant person. Once in a while he'd invite the junior officers over to his house which was a beautiful villa with a pool.

That was my Italian tour, and to this day I look fondly back to it. I wish I had stayed longer. I never had another tour in Italy. My next tour was Pretoria.

Q: Before you start talking about Pretoria, has the assignments process changed by now? Did you choose Pretoria?

ROSSI: I actually volunteered for Pretoria. There was notification sent around that included among other openings an Afrikaans-language economic slot in Pretoria so I volunteered for it. By the time the assignment actually came through, I was less interested in leaving Italy than I had been earlier, and we were more into the Italian culture. I'm trying to remember whether open assignments had started by then or not, and I honestly don't remember. I had visited South Africa from Malawi a couple of times. I had first gone down on a medical evacuation when I tore up my knee, one of many times I tore up my knee. I had an operation in South Africa. Then my wife and I went down on a short vacation to South Africa and visited a few South Africa cities. Thus in early 1976, I was back at FSI this time in Afrikaans language training.

We ended up arriving sometime in early August of '76 in Pretoria. That's the South African winter, and Pretoria is on the high plateau at about 5,500 ft. It's a short winter, but nights get pretty cold, particularly since the houses don't have central heating. We arrived early in the evening but after dark. We went over to my boss's house for dinner with the family and then went back home and got ready for bed. We found the house was quite cold, probably around 40 degrees. The walls are about a foot thick with brick.

There were some space heaters there, so we put them out in the various bedrooms for the kids and one for ourselves, turned them on, and went to bed. About an hour later, the circuit breaker tripped, and the space heaters went off and all the lights went off. I had no idea where the circuit breaker box was. I learned from then on that there was a definite limit to the number of space heaters you can attach to these old South African homes before the wiring would overload. We learned exactly how many you could run at any one time. But that night, we didn't know it, and it was dark, and we couldn't find our way around the house. We ended up sleeping in a pretty cold house that night. Afterwards we learned to cope with all these things. Considering we were in Africa, you don't normally think about being cold there.

Since I had visited down to South Africa a couple of times before and had served in the region, I knew the country and the political situation to some degree. Apartheid was still in practice. It was after the Soweto riots, and pressure was growing on the government to reduce apartheid. Some aspects of apartheid were slowly being dismantled, but the main elements were still in place when I arrived.

It was an interesting place politically. There was a debate going on within the Afrikaner community about apartheid between the more progressive group (verlichters) and the more conservative group (verkrampters). It was a turbulent, interesting period.

I was an economic officer there. The economy was doing pretty well most of the time I was there, but it also was the period of the Carter administration. Carter decided he was going to get much tougher on South Africa than previous administrations had been. Much of my work involved implementing these tougher policies. One of them was on export controls like light aircraft and things of this nature. One of my responsibilities was to set up a whole system to check on purchases of light aircraft (Piper, Cessna, etc) and their later use. There was sort of an Air National Guard militia in South Africa where members supplied their own planes, and the Carter administration did not want any U.S. manufactured planes being used for that. Checking on all this became very time-consuming and cut back on our ability to do economic reporting.

We did the usual economic reporting there. South Africa was and is the most developed economy in Africa so it was quite different from doing economic reporting on the two other African countries I had served in. It was probably closer to a European economy than to the African ones. However, the political situation was often a factor in the economy and became more so after I left.

One of the more interesting aspects of my job was that I was also responsible for the economic reporting on Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). We had closed our consulate general in Salisbury by that time following the white Rhodesian government's declaration of independence (UDI). Thus the Pretoria economic section was responsible for reporting all Rhodesian economic issues. We had to do all this by long distance - talking to people, reading Rhodesian press and publications, etc - since we were not allowed by the USG to go up to Rhodesia.

I found it a very interesting tour. Of course, the living conditions were fairly good. It's a good climate and, compared to other African countries I'd been in, the availability of goods and services was far better.

I had come out of two rather ruthless and authoritarian African dictatorships in my earlier posts, so I was used to countries with rather limited freedom and the political situation in South Africa was not a big change for me. I hadn't seen much of democracy in Africa at that point. In fact, there were some areas where there was more freedom in South Africa than there had been in Congo or Malawi. There was relative freedom of the press and a more or less independent judiciary, and opposition political parties, none of which existed in my other two African posts. The apartheid system was oppressive, but you really had to go out of the major cities to find its real impact, into the African townships, the "homelands", and places like that. It was less obvious in the central cities.

Q: Were sanctions an issue aside from just controls?

ROSSI: The only major sanction that had been put in place was prohibition on sales of military weapons. Other sanctions came in later, after I left. The military sales ban was a UN resolution. However the Carter administration was interpreting it much broadly than before to include a host of dual- use items.

There were issues related to spare parts for planes, particularly aircraft and other things that had been sold previously. Those were being done on a case-by-case basis. Also, a number of civilian version C-130's had been sold to an air cargo company, which was ultimately owned by the South African government. There was concern in an emergency those planes would be used for military purposes.

These issues had been out there before, but when the Carter administration came in, they were looked at much more critically. The Carter administration would tend to err on the side of being more restrictive rather than less. There were other sanctions that were under discussion at that time by the Administration against South Africa but most did not come to into effect while I was there.

One of our other jobs was dealing with American companies that were in South Africa. There were a large number of American companies that had been in South Africa for many years and were well established in the country. They were under heavy pressure both from the Carter administration and from private American groups to either withdraw their investment or adapt more liberal labor policies. Out of this came an investment code named after a black minister in Philadelphia.

Q: Sullivan code.

ROSSI: How could I forget the famous Sullivan code? The Sullivan code was developed to pressure US companies in South Africa to follow more liberal (anti-apartheid) labor practices. One of our jobs was to report on how the progress of this, how the American companies were adhering to it, how was it working, and that sort of thing. Certainly the net result was the American-owned companies in South Africa were much more liberal and tried harder to improve the position of their black employees than most other South African companies did. It was not perfect. Some companies were less active than others, but all felt the pressure to do something.

It was a period when Apartheid was under severe pressure. Our political section had the greater responsibility in this area. On the economics side, there was also a lot of pressure, too, and we did regular reporting on the impact of the apartheid struggle on what was a rather large and sophisticated economy.

Q: Did you visit the gold mines and the diamond mines there?

ROSSI: Yes, I did. I visited them both. They were all fascinating to see. Certainly the gold mine, I think we went down about 12,000 feet or something but some mines were much deeper. This is the absolute limits of technology that you can actually mine that far down. The South Africans have been doing it for a long time and have gotten very good at the technology. They are highly mechanized mines. They had gold miners from all over southern Africa.

I didn't find the status of the black miners all that bad. I thought they were treated fairly decently. You have to remember that I had been in Malawi where Malawians would fight to get a chance to work in the South African gold mines because it was one of the few paying jobs that they could get. The same was true of Mozambique and other neighboring countries which also sent many workers to the gold mines. I thought the mines did a decent job of trying to feed, clothe and pay their miners what was then a considered a decent wage. One could argue back and forth about that. The main problem of course was that the white miners, who held the more highly skilled jobs, were paid far more than the black miners.

Q: This was about the time when the homelands were becoming independent as well. Did that affect our relations? Did we have American businesses in the homelands?

ROSSI: Transkei was the one homeland actually in operation, that had its own government, when I arrived, but others became "independent" or were declared independent while I was there. I'm not aware of any American-owned businesses that were headquartered in the homelands. The USG would have strongly discouraged that. An American company could not do what a big South African businessman did and set up the big Sun City project in Bophuthatswana, a homeland not far from Pretoria.

No American company to my knowledge made any investments in the homelands. There were some mines there I think that had been there before they declared independent and were just kept going. I think there was a manganese mine in Bophuthatswana. I remember I had to get up and visit it before they declared independence because the Embassy would not let me visit it afterwards.

South Africa, of course, is well known as a huge amount of mineral resources. Not just gold and diamonds but manganese, chrome, and many other things. Mining is a very major industry there.

It was a funny economy. At that point, I had served in two rather poor African countries and then a European country. South Africa was a mixture between the two. Significant elements of South Africa were as fully developed as anything you would see in the U.S. particularly in the cities. Johannesburg and Pretoria could be Midwestern cities for all you could tell. Even the white farms were mechanized. Only when you got out of the cities and away from what were called the "white areas" did you see the other side, the less developed side of the African economy. This was particularly true when you got to the black homelands, which were the poorest and least developed part of the economy.

Q: Did you spend a lot of time in Johannesburg as an economic officer?

ROSSI: I can't say I spent a lot of time there. I went down to call on people, take visitors down there. We had a consulate general down there. They did a lot of work, and we also had a minerals officer down there. They would send material up to me which I would include in my economic reporting. The same was true of the other three consulates, too.

I went down to Cape Town a couple of times a year, particularly for the budget speech which is one of the few times I actually used my Afrikaans. My Afrikaans went downhill while I was there. All the educated Afrikaners, particularly ones I dealt with, spoke excellent English, most spoke better English than I spoke Afrikaans. We ended up exchanging pleasantries in Afrikaans and then ended up doing all the work in English. I remember several of the Afrikaners in the central bank had Masters degrees from very American universities like Stanford. Of course, their English was at a very high level.

The budget speech and a few occasions like that was one of the few occasions when I actually used my Afrikaans. There was also an Afrikaans business association. They had a convention every year and that was completely in Afrikaans. After three days of that my Afrikaans would come back to some degree, but then I'd start losing it again. I think you used your Afrikaans a lot more than I used mine.

Q: I was following parliamentary six months a year instead of for one day!

ROSSI: Yes! Literally, this was the only post I was in where my language went downhill during my tour.

Q: Did you have any high level visitors you had to take care of?

ROSSI: Yes. Kissinger came in that period. The first six months that I was there was still the Ford administration. Kissinger came in. There were ongoing negotiations with South Africans on several issues. The two biggest ones then were Rhodesia and Namibia. Kissinger came in with a big entourage, many planes, and was going to "settle" these two issues with the South Africans. I think you were probably involved in this, too. Virtually the whole embassy was roped in to help with this as was I. I had seen Kissinger at work in Rome. There was a presidential visit while I was in Rome. Gerry Ford came with Kissinger and a huge entourage.

Rome was my only major presidential visit. To see what goes on in a presidential visit was quite amazing in Rome. The White House staff people were rather overbearing, and I was embarrassed at how demanding they were with the Italian foreign ministry officials. A major part of the problem was that there was not just one advance White House staff group but several, each with their own agenda and demands. The Italians took it in better humor that I expected. I guess they were somewhat used to it.

Anyway Kissinger came to Pretoria the first six months of my tour, and I worked on the visit. He was going to solve the Rhodesian and Namibian problems or issues. It didn't happen, of course. He negotiated with the South Africans for several days, but my recollection was that little progress was made. Anyway these two issues were the subject of prolonged negotiations between South Africa and the U.S. over my entire tour in Pretoria.

I stayed in South Africa for four years. Main reason we stayed there for so long was my wife Mary had previously decided she wanted to become a nurse-midwife. Thus she was attended a nursing school in Johannesburg although she already had a bachelor's degree in biology. She was going to school for most of our tour in Pretoria and commuting to Johannesburg. Fortunately, we had a very good staff at the house who helped take care of the kids. Mary would come home some nights, but other nights she's have to stay over at the school which of course was attached to a hospital. I had to pitch in with the kids more that I had in the past but it worked out reasonably well.

She got her degree as a nurse-midwife. We left South Africa in mid-1980, and we came back to the U.S. We had planned to come back because the kids were approaching high school age. Excluding some language training, we had been outside the U.S. for ten years at that point essentially. We came back in '80 just in time to see Reagan inaugurated, and we went to the parade, the only inaugural parade I've ever been to.

Q: I think I'm going to stop you there because I think we're just about at the end of this tape, and we want to start the assignment on a new tape.

Today is July 27, 2007. You've come back to the States to take what job?

ROSSI: I took a job in the economic policy staff in the African bureau of State. The title of the job was economist, and we dealt with a variety of Africa-wide economic issues. Again, it was an interesting job. It was my second tour in the Africa bureau in Washington. I had been on a desk 10 years earlier, so I was by that time an Africa hand.

The transition back to the States was a little tough personally. After you've been overseas for a long time, it takes reintegration. The kids had no real memory of the States. They knew they were Americans but they hadn't been in the States very much. Every foreign service person faces this type of tough transitions back into U.S. culture - the cost of living and the fact you are on your own for housing and a number of other day-to- day issues the Embassy took care of overseas. We were initially living in a townhouse which turned out to be too small for a family. After about a year we bought a larger house thanks to a loan from my mother-in-law.

The job involved Africa-wide economic issues. One of the first things I got involved with in the first months was a worldwide campaign to keep the PLO from being given observer status in the IMF and IBRD. It was amazing to see the amount of high-level pressure on this issue especially since we are now on good terms with the PLO. I think we called in every chit in the world on the issue. I realize now that the campaign was probably mainly driven by domestic political pressure in the U.S.

Q: Did we succeed?

ROSSI: Yes, by a very small margin, we succeeded but it was a close call. It was actually a couple of African countries that swung the vote.

One of my jobs there was I ran the self-help program for all of Africa. For those who don't know, this is a very small AID-funded program that the ambassadors themselves have to use in their country for what we call "self-help" projects. The level of each embassy's program varies from $20,000 to $100,000. In contrast, the regular and far bigger AID program run through the AID missions had all sorts of strings attached, numerous bureaucratic requirements and restrictions, and take a long time to develop. This one small fund was at the ambassador's discretion (within certain guidelines) and could be quickly dispersed.

A typical self-help project involved our providing building materials and things of this nature for a school which the villagers would then build with their own labor. Often the Peace Corps was involved in coordinating the project. Because of its flexibility, the self-help fund was very popular both within the African countries and with the Embassies.

It was an interesting tour, and I had a couple of trips back to Africa during that period. I made a point to go to the Sahel. I had never been to there and so I went on a two week trip which included then Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad. The Sahel is the poorest region in Africa, and you wonder how the populations survive in this very arid region. This trip also gave me my first look at Nigeria, the most populous African county. None of the places I visited on the trip left me with any desire to serve there.

That was my tour in AF/EPS.

Q: Do you remember what any of the other substantive economic issues were?

ROSSI: That's a good question. I'm trying to think back.

Q: How about South African sanctions at that point. Were they any different under a new administration?

ROSSI: It was. Yes, there was a new administration. Reagan had come in and Chet Crocker had come in as the assistant secretary for Africa. He had been one of the advisors for the Reagan campaign. His whole approach was to take a different tack from the Carter administration and follow a policy of what he called "constructive engagement" to try and work with the South Africans to forge change, peacefully in southern Africa.

Crocker embarked on a long-almost six year-period of negotiation with the South Africans on trying to change parts of Apartheid, particularly on Namibia, independence for Namibia. By that time, there had been a settlement in Rhodesia that Mugabe had won the election. One of my last things in South Africa before I left was to get up to Rhodesia-Zimbabwe now-which I had never been allowed to visit before. It was fascinating, a beautiful country. Just shortly after the armistice there was hardly anybody on the roads there because many of them had been mined. Outside of South Africa, Rhodesia at that point had the best economy in Africa, very well balanced. Of course, Robert Mugabe has pretty much destroyed that economy now.

The pressure on South Africa was coming more from outside the federal government, from states and cities and groups that were lobbying for sanctions against South Africa. I was not directly involved in that. The administration was to some degree resistant to sanctions. There was a democratic majority in Congress for much of that period, and many of the democrats wanted more sanctions. The South African issues were dominating the African bureau at this time so they tended to be handled by Crocker's front office or AF/S rather than my economic office.

One of our major jobs was liaison between AID and the African bureau. We represented the Africa bureau on all the AID country projects and county programming levels. U.S. assistance is of course of key importance for most of the African countries and so the aid levels had a major impact on our relations with these countries in every area. Not infrequently, State and AID disagreed on the levels of assistance for the various countries or the type of air to be provided. I spent a lot of time fighting these battles. Aid liked to concentrate assistance on a few large countries whereas AF would to see it more widely spread.

Q: Did you have the sense that there was any high level interest in Africa generally in the administration?

ROSSI: There was in the sense that it was mostly on South Africa, I would say. That had become the big issue and was for almost a decade there or longer. I did not sense there was a lot of interest on other areas in Africa. I think if you work in the Africa bureau for any length time, you get used to being the lowest on the totem pole in terms of the regional bureaus. EUR gets the most attention. EA-East Asia-and the Middle East compete for second place, and so on down the line.

The Africa bureau on a normal day or a normal week is the bottom of the totem pole and doesn't get a great deal of high level attention. South Africa was getting a certain amount, but that was about it. In some ways, it's a blessing because you get fewer political appointees in Africa. You get fewer congressional junkets in Africa. The professionals are left to deal to a large degree with foreign policy in Africa.

Q: Did you have to go up to the Hill a fair amount?

ROSSI: No. I didn't go up to the Hill. That wasn't one of my jobs. I did deal with the IMF and the World Bank quite a bit. There are all sorts of loans for various African countries. I dealt with the export/import bank. I went to a lot of their meetings. We dealt with IMF. There would be IMF programs in a lot of these countries, and we would use our aid as leverage to pressure the governments to sign and adhere to IMF agreements. They could insist on tougher economic and fiscal policies than we really could on a bilateral basis.

The IMF and the World Bank provide a lot of aid money to Africa, the World Bank particularly. Many people don't realize what a large percentage of the aid to the poor countries gets funneled through organizations like this. World Bank is the quieter one, but they actually have more money in terms of helping these countries. That was a large chunk of my work.

Q: How about debt rescheduling?

ROSSI: Yes. I would not...

Q: Paris Club? Is that what it's called?

ROSSI: Yes, the Paris Club. I was somewhat involved in the Paris Club. It was not my primary job, but we took positions and we were usually supporting liberal terms for debt rescheduling for the poorer African countries. It was clear they could never repay the debts and really could not even handle the payments. Treasury would support tough terms for debt rescheduling, and it was being fought out in various venue. I'd been overseas for 10 years so I got to know that part of the bureaucracy. The Treasury Dept essentially controls the U.S. representatives to the World Bank and the IMF. They are supposed to take inter-agency advice on the U.S. positions on various loans, but they are essentially Treasury's men in those two organizations. We had our share of battles with Treasury. In fact, we almost had more battles with Treasury than with the IMF.

Treasury had a more hard-nosed bankers approach to these things, and the AID approach was not their cup of tea to a great degree. They recognized that Africa had the poorest countries and needed money, but they still wanted the loans repaid. My personal view is that it was pointless to make this assistance loans. They should have been grants. A loan assumes that the money is going to generate a higher level of productivity and the economy is going to produce enough additional foreign exchange to service these loans, and that almost never happened. So these countries would fall further and further into debt. The loan usually did help people for a time, but it didn't jump start an economy or lead to much industrial growth or even more modern agriculture. I came to the view that if you're going to help Africa, make it a grant because the loans were just building up this burden which became another add-on to all their other economic problems. Admittedly there was a need for the pressure for African countries on economic reform, and many of them have atrocious economic policies. The IMF was a little better at that than we were. Years later, most of the African aid loans were just forgiven.

I did two years in economic policy staff. I was still an FSO-O2 then, and I was disappointed that I hadn't been promoted to 01. Thus I started looking around for a job that would enhance my promotion prospects. I started bidding on various DCM jobs in Africa with the understanding that I probably need to go overseas without my family since the oldest kids were in high school or were approaching it. I felt my career needed a jump start so I worked my African bureau contacts, and I was named as DCM to Gabon. I took the DCM course, a refresher French course, and went off by myself to Libreville.

Q: Before you get to Libreville, you mentioned the DCM course. What did you think of that? What did it entail?

ROSSI: It was a good course. It lasted about a week course, pretty much all up in an isolated State Park in western Maryland. It was very beautiful scenery up there. It was early in the season, I think May, so we had the whole park to ourselves and a little lodge up there.

The course by that time had been well refined. I think they gave you a personality test and this sort of thing. The major point they wanted to drill into you, was that you have to get along with your ambassador no matter what. If you're going to start fighting with your ambassador, you're going to lose. You better adapt yourself to the ambassador's style. That turned out to be very good advice. I should have taken on a little more than I did, but I think it was excellent advice.

Q: I would have thought especially going to an African post there might have been stress on making sure your staff was happy and morale issues.

ROSSI: That points was made but it was not the main thrust of the course They pointed out that different ambassadors have different approaches to things, and you've got to find out what part of the workload the ambassador wants to take, and you've got to take the rest of it. The traditional organization is the ambassador deals with high level negotiations with the government and the president of the country and other high level representation. The DCM runs-manages-the embassy.

They pointed out that that's the prototype, but that isn't the way it always works. Many ambassadors get very deeply involved in the management of the embassy. You have to adapt and fill in the areas the ambassador doesn't want to take on himself. A super active ambassador may in a small post take over practically everything.

Q: Who was your ambassador?

ROSSI: It was Terry McNamara. He was a very dynamic guy who had extensive service in Africa and two tours in Vietnam. He was something of a Cold Warrior. He was very professional and excellent in dealing with his high level contacts in Gabon. I sometimes thought Gabon was a little too small for his high energy level. He and his wife were very good to me. Because my family wasn't with me, I was a bachelor there, and they had me over frequently for family dinners. I got to know him very well.

It was a fairly good tour. Gabon is an exceptional African country. It has a small population, and due to oil reserves is has more wealth on a per capita basis than most countries in the area. The French were very heavily involved there and had been for a long time. There were a very large number of French residents in Gabon, something like 30,000 when I was there. In a country of maybe 650,000 people, that is a lot. When you go to the downtown of Libreville, sometimes it looked like a small town in southern France. There were a lot of white faces!

There was a French battalion at the airport and French companies dominated the economy. Every ministry had several French advisers who were often the go-to people when you wanted to get something done with that ministry.

One of Terry McNamara's main endeavors in Gabon was to expand the American commercial and economic presence there and bring in American companies. Omar Bongo, who was the president of the country and one of the longest lasting African dictators, cooperated to some degree because he wanted another card to play with the French. He realized the French were important and necessary to him, but he didn't want to be under their thumb. He wanted to be able to play this American card. There was a three-way thing going on between Bongo, the Americans and the French where Bongo would announce he was going to do something with the Americans. The French would get mad and go see Bongo and say, "You can't do this, and we can do this and this and this if you do." Bongo would back down a little bit but in the process of backing down would get another concession out of the French. It got to be a little game after a while. Terry was into it and enjoyed it greatly. I was not that good at it, but he loved to tweak the French.

We did get some American business investment. One oil company came in. I don't know their concession turned out all that profitable, but they did get one concession. Most of the oil in Gabon is just slightly off shore. It was in small pockets rather than in large deposits but they were constantly finding more of these small pockets of oil. Thus there was a far amount of wealth in Gabon, particularly in Libreville, at least by African standards..

Q: Did it trickle down to the ordinary people?

ROSSI: Only partially. Obviously, a lot of it did not. One advantage Bongo had was a fairly small population. Bongo tried to arrange jobs for the educated Gabonese who came out of high school and college thus co-opt possible opposition. So there was some trickle down. An awful lot did not trickle down and was spent by Bongo and the elite.

Bongo had, I believe, the most coup-proof government in Africa. There had been a coup just before he came in, when he was a young man in the government and an aide to the previous president. This was the late '60s. The French had come in and put down the coup. Bongo seemed to learn a lot from this. After he became president, he established a Presidential guard which was officered by ex-French legionnaires and largely recruited from his own tribal group. This was a substantial and well trained military organization of around 1,200 men with light armor and an air force. Around Libreville, this was by far the strongest military force. The army would tend to be spread around closer to the borders of the country.

For somebody who wanted to overthrow Bongo, the guard made it almost impossible. No army group could take on the Presidential guard which was loyal to Bongo and to my knowledge still remains loyal to his son who is now in power.

Q: How big was the embassy staff at that time?

ROSSI: Very small. Because of Gabon's per capita income, we had no AID mission there. I think we had about 12 Americans not counting the marine guards. We had another seven marine guards. All totaled, the total number of Americans in that place may have been approaching 15 to 20. We did have a Peace Corps organization there. It's actually one of the tougher jobs for Peace Corps because the volunteers tended to be out in small villages. Once you got outside Libreville, you were in the rainforest and the jungle. Libreville was a relatively modern city. The level of development went down very quickly after you got out outside of town, and the PC volunteers were out in these very small villages, usually on the rivers and in unhealthy places. It was a tough place for them.

The other thing going on in that period was Bongo was building a railway down to Franceville which was his home area in southern Gabon. They were cutting right through rain forest. The rationale was to bring manganese and other minerals in the area of Franceville up to Libreville and ship it out through that port. Previously it had gone over the mountains to Congo Brazzaville and gone out through the port of Point Noir. He spent huge amounts of money on this project. It was an amazing sight to see - a line of bulldozers cutting a swath 200 yards wide thru virgin forest. Of course, no one seemed to worry about the damage to the environment. The project was finished about the time I was leaving, and I think the railway is up and running.

Q: There must have been some remote, unpopulated areas if was only 600,000 people in the country. It's a fair sized country, isn't it?

ROSSI: It is. Most of the country is rain forest. Once you get out of Libreville and the few other large towns, the level of development and population drops sharply. It's near subsistence agriculture once you get out in the jungle. The rain forest is not a very easy place to make a living.

Gabon is where Lambarene is, Dr. Schweitzer's hospital. I went down and visited it as does everybody who serves there. It is the old Gabon, back to an earlier colonial era. The original hospital is preserved as a museum, and they built a more modern hospital there. It's still run by Europeans - largely well-meaning, dedicated, self-sacrificing doctors and nurses from Europe who had essentially given up much of their lives to work with the Africans here. It was a good hospital.

There was a certain amount of resentment among the young educated Gabonese in Libreville about Schweitzer in general and the hospital in particular because they felt this had been a paternalistic system run by whites for the Africans, and that the Africans hadn't been brought into the management. That was changing then but perceptions change slowly.

Also the young college-educated Gabonese were pretty well paid, and usually lived in the two large cities, not out in remote places like Lambarene where they would have to depend on this hospital for medical care. The Hospital at Lambarene served the whole region there. Often people traveled by canoe to get there since Lambarene is on the country's major river. It is only about 20 miles from the equator.

I'll tell you my one equator story. Driving down to Lambarene, you could cross the equator. Thus I wanted to test the theory that in a funnel, water in the northern hemisphere spins around in one direction as it drains, and in the southern hemisphere goes in the other director. Right on the equator, we stopped-I had a large funnel-and got out of the car. I poured a gallon of water through it to see which way it would spin. Sure enough, it didn't spin either way! I gurgled straight down! This is one of my poor Gabon stories.

My personal reaction to the Gabon tour was mixed. Libreville is of course very hot and humid but the large French presence meant that there were more amities available than in many other African capitals. However this was the first time in some 17 years that I had been at post without my wife and family and that took some adjustment. In addition to the obvious things, I found I missed my wife's excellent entertaining skills. I had a fair amount of representational responsibilities and I was not at all good at organizing a dinner party.

I worked fairly long hours in Libreville and, since I was DCM, I tried to help organize some activities that would boost morale at post. I remember I organized a 10K run and also an "across the equator" boat trip. Libreville is only about 10 miles from the equator by sea and the embassy had an 18-foot E&E boat we could use on weekends. In view of the traditions associated with a sea crossing of the equator, I organized a boat trip and picnic down the coast to the equator. Halfway through our picnic, a thunder storm came up, and we had to make a run for home.

I left Gabon after two years there and went back to Washington to work in INR as a division chief.

Q: For...

ROSSI: For the office for African analysis, so I was back in my old Africa thing. I worked for Tony Dalsimer who I had known in the Congo. That was interesting, too. I had been promoted in Gabon, so I was a little more comfortable as I was what's now an 01.

Q: Which year are we talking about that you started in this job?

ROSSI: 1984. I have always noticed a Foreign Service career breaks into nice bite size chunks based on your assignments. I came back from Pretoria in '80, spent two years in Washington on the economic policy staff, and then in '82 went to Gabon for two years, then came back in '84, spent two years in INR.

Q: So this is the middle of '84 when you were taking over the deputy director of office of African analysis. What were the big issues in the middle of '84 in Africa?

ROSSI: South Africa was still the major issue. We divided the work, and mine didn't include South Africa. I had all the rest of Africa. There were lots of crises in my area. We were still dealing with the aftermath of the coup in Liberia, for example, and a war in Chad which Libya was attacking as well as the usual crises in the horn of Africa.

INR's role is to provide independent analyses to the Secretary and other senior officials on pending foreign policy issues. The geographic bureaus like AF also provided analyses but they were usually in support of policy recommendations. We did not have a policy axe to grind, so we could be more objective. A big chunk of our job was to look at all the reports from all the agencies and do a concise, readable report for the seventh floor about the situation in the various countries.

Liberia was a significant issue. There was a lot going on in Sudan. I'm trying to remember. The dictator in Sudan was pro-Western but was under a lot of pressure. He eventually did fall, and more radical Islamic group took power. That was a major problem. The war in Chad took up a lot of my time. The U.S. was supporting the Chadian President Habrï¿½ against the forces of Libyan dictator Qadhafi. Libya of course had a lot of oil money so it was an uneven fight. However the Chadians gave a good account of themselves.

I recall one battle in the desert where a Chadian force with pickups mounting 50 cal machine guns took on a group of Libyan tanks and amazingly won. The pickups were moving so fast the tanks could not turn their turrets and big guns fast enough to fire on them.

Q: Was this Cold War related?

ROSSI: Not directly. Qadhafi was at that point considered one of the real bad guys in the world. He was supporting terrorists all over the world. I think he had contributed to the blowing up of the French airliner in Africa that killed the wife of one of our ambassadors. Later on of course, he was behind the blowing up of the PanAm plane over Scotland. Through my whole career, Qadhafi and Libya had been supporting anti-American groups in Africa, providing money and aid and supporting terrorism against the U.S. particularly but also western interests in general. He was not however directly allied with the Soviets other than buying Soviet arms; he waged a terrorist campaign on his own using his oil money. This was 1985.

Q: Were there any other Cold War conflicts going on in Africa at the time that you were following?

ROSSI: Yes. But you have to back in time a bit to understand it. The Carter administration had decided that it didn't want Africa to be the scene of a Cold War competition and strife. They made a decision the U.S. would not compete with the Russians and Cubans in Africa as we had in the past. The problem was that nobody told the Russians or Cubans about this or if they were told, they ignored it.

Thus by the late '70s and early '80s, there were very large numbers of Cuban troops spread all over Africa, particularly in Angola. These were backed by Soviet arms and money. At one point, there were also large numbers in Ethiopia and smaller numbers in Congo Brazzaville where they propped up rather ruthless regimes. The largest and longest lasting Cuban contingent was Angola where they tipped the balance in the civil war there. There were smaller Cuban military units in another dozen or so African countries. In several cases, the Cuban proved the difference in the victory of a left-wing faction over a more moderate one. So yes, there was very much a Cold War.

When the Reagan administration came in, they took the opposite attack that they were going to resist this Russian-Cuban intrusion into Africa. That was the time that we started supporting Savimbi's forces in Angola.

To answer your question, the Cold War was very much going on. It was interesting to see the two administrations because Carter took one approach, and Reagan and the republicans took a very different approach in terms of competing with the Russians and Cubans and denying them facilities and things like this.

Q: You were offering independent advice to the policy makers. Do you find that they took your advise, care about your advice?

ROSSI: I think they did, not that they would do a 180 degree switch on policy towards a given country. They would take it on board to the extent that when the geographic bureaus came in with their recommendations, somebody would remember the papers we did and say, "What about this or that?" I think it served as a moderating element on the policy recommendations of the bureaus. Also, it served as an independent analysis of the situation as it was on the ground.

The geographic bureaus, I think, I appreciated our reports. They didn't have time to sit down, look at all the reports from CIA, DIA and other agencies and write in depth analyses. We could do that. We could take all the intelligence community reports plus reporting by the various embassies and sit down and write a think piece. Having been a desk officer, I know that the desks really don't have time to do that. That was one of the points of setting up INR was to give people the chance to sit down and look at all this stuff and analyze it. I think it worked pretty well when I was there.

Q: This is Tape 3B. It's July 27. I'm speaking with Herman Rossi. I'm Peter Eicher. Before we leave INR, I wanted to ask you how you interacted with the rest of the intelligence community.

ROSSI: I interacted with them frequently and that was one of the interesting aspects of working in INR. I had never had a job before that was directly part of the intelligence community. INR is State's arm in the intelligence community. We had considerable interaction with other intelligence agencies, particularly with the CIA. We were involved in The National Intelligence Estimates. I can't recall which ones I was involved in.The CIA chairs the group that drafts the national intelligence estimates. They will designate somebody to draft it, usually someone from CIA because CIA has more money and people than we have. We look at it, edit it, and change it to our express agreement or disagreement with it-usually parts of it as the case may be. I had a lot of interaction with CIA, less so with DIA. I had seen the intelligence community at work overseas but it was very useful to get an understanding of their much larger operation in Washington.

Q: Without revealing any intelligence information, what was your impression of how good the CIA was at what they did?

ROSSI: I had seen both sides of the CIA, the operations and the intelligence side at this stage of the game. On the intelligence side, I think they produced generally good reports and analyses. I thought their problem was they had too many layers between the drafter and the final approval. It seemed each layer would tend to water down the conclusions to some degree. My personal opinion-and obviously I'm biased-is that INR produced better reports on Africa than the CIA did. CIA has infinitely more resources but INR has a less bureaucratic system with smaller offices. The CIA was strong on Soviet bloc matters since large amount of statistics were needed there, and they had the greater resources. They could also produce far more reports than we could.

Some of our analysts had the advantage that they had served overseas for several tours, and I think that gave them a broader perspective. The CIA analysts generally had not served overseas. I think the agency produced good stuff. It's just that the sheer number of editors in the system tended to weaken the product. This is of course personal opinion.

Q: How about NSA? Did you deal with them as well?

ROSSI: We saw their product. I think I only went over there physically once in my tour. We didn't deal regularly with their people. Their reports were considered very sensitive, and we would personally take them over to the front office of the Africa bureau to show to the Assistant Secretary and his deputies. We could not leave the reports there. I did not have much in the way of personal dealings with NSA because they mainly dealt in raw intelligence while we did finished analyses. I had far more dealings with CIA.

Q: We will get to that when we fill in more tours. What happened after?

ROSSI: I was in INR from '84 to '86. To explain future movements, I need to throw in a little personal note that my wife and I separated shortly after I came back from Gabon in '84. Family separations are never easy, and we of course had other issues. Anyway, we were keeping two households during much of my period at INR. By the end of that tour, I was very much looking for a hardship post. My four kids were in or getting ready to start college, so I was looking for a high differential post which had government housing. I didn't have a stick of furniture. A post as Economic Counselor in Monrovia came open, and I decided to bid on it, and I was assigned there.

Q: Before we move on to Liberia, if it's not too personal I think it would be interesting as part of this history. Do you think that it is the Foreign Service and particularly the separated assignments that's happening more and more these days that contributed to your breakup?

ROSSI: It's hard to put your finger on one factor. Certainly there were significant factors outside the Foreign Service life but the separations probably contributed. I was gone for two years in Gabon. I can't blame the divorce on the Foreign Service but aspects of the Foreign Service life probably contributed to it.

Carrying on, I got the job as head of the economic section in Liberia. I went there in mid '86, and it was a differential post. My oldest son was starting college about then and a couple of years later I had four kids in college at one time, so Liberia turned out to be a good post for me from a financial perspective. As usual, it had good points and bad points. The climate is terrible. One needs a bit of background to understand the situation in Liberia in 1986 when I came. From the 1840's until 1980, Liberia was ruled by a group of black freemen that had come back from the United States called the Americo-Liberians. They were never more than 5% of the population, but they had ruled the country for well over a century and had become a ruling elite over the patchwork of local tribes.

Liberia is like most of the west African countries. There are seven or eight different tribes speaking seven or eight different languages. In 1980, there was a coup by a group of native Liberian army noncoms who overthrew the Americo-Liberian government. Samuel Doe was one of the leaders, but he was only one of the leaders at the time. He eventually emerged as the dominant figure in the post coup period. He was, I think, like a lot of the African dictators, someone who had a lot of political street smarts and was skilled at maintaining himself in power but had almost no skill in managing the economy.

The overall Liberian economy, when I was there, was very uneven. The government's finances were in terrible shape. Corruption was rampant and little money was reaching the key sectors like health and education.. But because the U.S. dollar was the legal currency of Liberia along with the Liberian dollar, the private sector actually ran reasonably well. Importers could buy their foreign exchange directly from the exporter, so they didn't have to go through the Liberian government. Goods and services were relatively plentifully in Liberia.

The strongest part of the economy was what we called "the foreign concessions". These were iron ore mines and rubber plantations which were owned and operated by foreign companies. Firestone was the best known and biggest of the group. The price of rubber was strong so most of the concessions were doing well. Also, there was a steady trickle of gold and diamonds being mined by small-scale prospectors up in the north of the country, and that was contributing to the economy. There was also a considerable amount of logging taking place. Unfortunately, the logging was unregulated and was slowly wiping out one of the last rainforests in west Africa. Aerial pictures of Liberia at the time I was there and compared to 20 years earlier show a huge decline of the great hardwood forests that covered Liberia.

That was part of the problem with the Doe government. The logging companies were most small-scale foreign entrepreneurs, not large corporations, and they would pay off the officials and be left to do whatever they wanted. It was a rather corrupt government even by African standards. I was three years in Liberia; I extended a year because largely for financial reasons. Our work over that time was dominated by our effort to persuade and guide Samuel Doe into better economic policies. We had a lot of communication facilities in Liberia such as the Voice of America and other things. We had significant interests there, far more so than the size of the country would indicate. Therefore we were pouring a fair amount of aid into Liberia and were getting frustrated that the economy-at least the government section of the economy-was so mismanaged.

One should not understate the impact on the country of the government's financial chaos. Many key sectors depended on the Liberian government. These included the hospitals and clinics, nearly all the schools, the electricity infrastructure, and of course roads. All were being starved of funds. The electricity grid was falling apart and there were frequent outages. I remember one particularly bad example. The navigation aids and radio beacons at Roberts Field airport (the country's main airport) were only working sporadically and were steadily deteriorating. The government could not find the money to repair them. Americans, Liberians and everyone who came in and out of the airport were at greater risk as a result. (I recall the Embassy begged the USAID mission to allocate a couple hundred thousand out of their multi-million dollar budget to refurbish the navaids. They refused stating it was outside USAID's "development philosophy".)

Our efforts with Doe had a mixed record. We kept him from doing the worst things, but the government's overall management improved only briefly and that was a period where we sent into some AID advisors into the Ministry of Finance to actually manage the cash flow. This was a deal worked out during a visit by George Schultz, then Secretary of State.

I was closely involved in this effort. I think it was working. It was helping improve the government's finances although it was far from solving the overall problem. The program was in place for only a year. It was supposed to stay in place for two years. The ambassador pulled the plug on the project after a year. He felt that the advisors were not being allowed to manage all the government's resources so it was not worthwhile to manage just part of them.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ROSSI: Jim Bishop who is, of course, a very experienced Africa hand. I did not agree with his position on this issue, but I did not speak up strongly either. This was very much a judgment call, and it was the ambassador's judgment that the improvement wasn't worth the very large investment. These advisors were expensive people.

Doe was a difficult person to deal with. I didn't deal with him personally. The DCM and ambassador did. We had these substantial interests in Liberia, so we needed to deal with him. In some ways, it was a classic problem in dealing with dictators in countries where the U.S. had substantial interests. There was no better alternative to Doe on the horizon at that point and if we did not work with him, we imperiled significant interests that had been there for many years.

Q: Firestone and the mining companies could work all right despite this?

ROSSI: They worked pretty well. They paid their taxes to the government of which only part ever got into the formal government coffers. However, they were relatively prosperous.

The iron ore mine in the north was running fine except the deposit was running out. It was right against the Guinean-Liberian border. The iron ore deposit on the Liberian side of the border, which had been mined for 30 or 40 years, was near exhaustion. The deposit continued over into Guinea, but they never could get agreement to carry on the mining over there. It was a shame because there was already a railway and other mining infrastructure in place. The problem was the Guineans had wildly unrealistic expectations of how much money they could get from the project. The same was partially true of the Liberian Government. As a result, they could never reach an agreement. Toward the end of my tour in Liberia, the mine, which was Swedish-owned, essentially shut down. I do not believe it has ever reopened.

Q: How about the Liberian flag shipping registry?

ROSSI: That was a good source of income for the government. That was one of the reasons that the ambassador pulled the plug on the AID advisors because Doe would not agree to let the AID advisors handle the income from the Liberia shipping registry and the off-shore corporate registry that was part of it. Doe saw this as his own slush fund. The amount should not be exaggerated. It was a good and steady income, but it wasn't huge amounts of money.

During that time, there was a corporate fight in the U.S. for control of the shipping registry. I think the registry was damaged as a result of the internal struggle that went on. Doe eventually sided with one faction, and that was enough to tip the balance. The old professionals had been on one side, and a newer group was on the winning side.

Q: It must have been a good sized embassy.

ROSSI: It was, particularly for a small African country. We had a big mission with several other agencies besides State. We had USIS. We had Peace Corps. There was also a large AID mission with a fairly large program. Plus we had some diplomatic communications facilities there. All this went back to the old historical links to Liberia and the fact that up until 1980, it had always been looked on as a very stable place under the Americo-Liberian rule, a good place to put VOA facilities and other facilities like that. It became much less so after 1980. The whole U.S. approach to Liberia was involved in trying managing this problem. We had these facilities and interests in what had become a much less stable country with a government run by a corrupt and somewhat unpredictable leader.

The other thing that happened in the period that I was there was that Doe's base of support narrowed steadily. There had been a coup attempt against Doe just before I got there and he became a little paranoid after that. One of the results of this was the army was increasingly drawn just from his tribal group, the Krahn. This was a relatively small tribal group in eastern Liberia, but they had come to dominate the army and, to a degree, the government. This increased during my three years and was resented by the rest of the population. That, I think, was the major source of the civil war that broke out about six months after I left.

I left in about August of '89, and the civil war broke out in the north up near the Swedish iron ore mine in about January of '90'. It was very sad for the Liberian people because it was the start of a six civil war that devastated the country and the economy. In spite of all the government's problems, most people had had enough to eat and some had decent jobs while I was there. The civil war destroyed most of that. The concessions shut down. About the only thing that kept going through all this period was the illegal logging and some of the small-scale mining in the north. The more organized portions of the economy largely collapsed. Again, this was after I left. Doe was killed in the course of the civil war but his Krahn army fought on and kept the war going for several more years.

After I left Liberia and read about what was going on there, I found it very discouraging. Liberian was never a rich country but the private sector economy was operating well and showing real promise when I departed. It's another case of a country where a functioning economy was destroyed by political strife and tribal warfare.

One of the most discouraging factors was that in the final months of my tour there was a large Australian mining company that was on the verge of making a major investment in gold and diamond mining in northern Liberia. This was going to be a substantial investment and would have been a huge benefit to the Liberian economy. Of course, the civil war ended all prospects of that. On that sad note ended my last my last African tour.

Q: You left there in '88?

ROSSI: No, mid '89. At that point I still had kids in college, and I was still looking for a differential post. I was also still looking for government housing, but I did want to be closer to the kids. I didn't want them to grow up before I could see much of them in their college years.

The kids came out to Liberia at Christmastime each year to spend a couple of weeks with me. I think they got to like their visits. There were a number of other American and European kids back for the holidays and something of a party atmosphere for the expatriate kids. I wanted to see a bit more of them before they really grew up, so when an opportunity to go to Kingston, Jamaica as economic counselor arose, I took it.

Q: Can I stop you there?

ROSSI: Yes.

Q: Today is August 3. This is Peter Eicher continuing the interview with Herman Rossi. When we left off, you were just about to be assigned to Jamaica.

ROSSI: I got an assignment to Kingston, Jamaica as economic counselor. The reasons I went there were mainly personal. First of all, I still had four kids in college, so I needed a hardship differential post with government housing. Kingston, believe it or not, was a differential post due mainly to the crime in the city. It had a serious crime problem, and I think still does which I'll talk more on in a second.

My other reason was I wanted to be closer to my kids and see a bit more of them before they completely grew up. Most of them were in college at that stage. It's a long trip to Africa, so I wasn't getting to see all that much of them.

One footnote to my Africa career is that in my final weeks in Monrovia, well after I had been assigned to Kingston, I was offered the job of DCM in Madagascar. I turned it down. First I wanted to see more of my kids and secondly I was rather burnt out on Africa. I knew something about the situation in Madagascar and another troubled African country run by another ruthless dictator did not seem very attractive at the time. In retrospect, it would have been far better for my career if I that taken that job but I had other considerations.

Q: On to Jamaica. What year was this?

ROSSI: This was 1989. Michael Manley had come back to power a year or so earlier. In the '70s when he had been in power, he was something of a socialist and did not get along well with the U.S., and the U.S. did not get along well with him. The Jamaican economy had suffered a major decline during this period. When he came back to power in the late 1980s, Manley had become something of a born-again capitalist. I guess he's had seen the light from his previous problems and mistakes with the economy. He and the U.S. got along well during most of my tour. Among other things, we were cooperating on drug enforcement.

Jamaica does not produce hard drugs. It does produce a lot of marijuana which is grown up in the mountains. Some of it was grown for the local use, but is some is for export. Marijuana is a bulk item, so it isn't a high value thing. One of the major problems was the island and its crime network was becoming a staging area for hard drugs coming in from Columbia and places like that. We had a large drug enforcement presence there working with the Jamaicans. DEA was there and other agencies.

Let me touch on my job there. I was economic counselor or head of the economic section. It was a period when Jamaica had gone through a long period of economic problems. It was very heavily indebted. Briefing papers would say it was the most heavily indebted country in the world per capita. It had borrowed a lot from various banks and international institutions.

The country chronically lived beyond its means. It wanted to live at a higher standard of living than it could afford to on its export income. The major exports were bauxite and coffee and a few things like that; tourism was probably the biggest single foreign exchange earner. None of that seemed to balance with the consumption on the island. You can see where it was frustrating for the Jamaicans. When I got there, satellite dishes had come into use, so the Jamaicans could get American television and see how the Americans live.

There was a long tradition of immigration from Jamaica to other countries in search of work and opportunity. Previously, much of this immigration had gone to Great Britain. During the period I was there, this had shifted more to the United States, and many of the educated Jamaicans and others wanted to immigrate to the United States. The consular section had its hands full trying to cope with all this. That was not my job. I mention it for general background.

It was an interesting tour. I was impressed with the educated Jamaicans. Having been in a lot of third-world countries, I found the educated Jamaicans-which is perhaps a quarter of the population-very impressive people. You can see where Colin Powell gets his roots in Jamaica because there's a good work ethic there and stress on education.

My job was the normal economic reporting functions. We had some negotiations going on while I was there. The IMF negotiations were a chronic, ongoing thing. We had our own AID program, a fairly substantial AID program which we linked to compliance with the IMF program.

Except for Rome, this was my second experience with a political ambassador. He was named Glenn Holden. In Rome, I had been way down in the trenches from the ambassador I had only rarely contact with him. In Jamaica, I had frequent contact with the ambassador as the economic counselor. The gentleman was very congenial. He had built up a large insurance company-actually several companies-in California and was a political appointee. He wanted to do a good job in the country and seemed to be willing to take advice.

It was interesting for me to work with somebody who did not have a background in foreign service work or the intricacies of overseas economies. He was a very bright gentleman, but he had no real experience in international affairs or international finance. I tried my best to educate him on some of these issues, and he was overall receptive.

Q: Did you meet Michael Manley?

ROSSI: Yes, I did meet him.

Q: What was your impression of him?

ROSSI: Very bright, charismatic guy. He probably had some resemblances to Bill Clinton. He was very much of a people-person. You could see why he got re-elected. Probably a better politician than he actually was prime minister. He did the job fairly well. I think he shrank a little bit from the hard decisions which is easy to do. In Jamaica, if you raise the price of gasoline, you get rioting in the streets. Thus it is easier to avoid the tough calls. Manley made some of them. He shrank from some of the others. I thought overall he was a decent prime minister, certainly a charismatic figure.

Q: Good relations with the United States when you were there?ROSSI: We had had excellent relations with Jamaica. That side of it seemed to go well which is a complete turnaround from the '70s when Manley was in office before.

Q: How were American relations with the Caribbean in general? Wasn't that approximately the time of the Granada and Panama invasions?

ROSSI: In general, American relations were quite good. After the Grenada invasion, the U.S. made a fairly substantial investment in the Caribbean. A program called the Caribbean Basin Initiative poured in some money in support for investment and development in a whole number of areas.

That was the early '80s. By the time I got there in '89, this was still a republican administration. This was the Bush senior administration, and priorities had shifted elsewhere. All the resources and high level attention that had been focused on the Caribbean in the early '80s had diminished somewhat. The structure was still there, but it just didn't have the priority that it did previously.

Broadly, our relations with Jamaica and with the Caribbean were good with the exception of Cuba and Nicaragua. I'm trying to think of problem areas, but they really were fairly modest. We had a slew of ongoing problems at any given time, but they were problems that arise between two countries that have lots of trade and investment contacts, not countries that are at loggerheads. The level of U.S. assistance to Jamaica was of course a key ongoing issue.

Q: How were relations with Cuba?

ROSSI: Not greatly different than they are now. This was the period right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There was some expectation in Jamaican circles that without Soviet support, the Castro government would collapse. It had been heavily subsidized by the Soviets so they felt Castro could not last. Therefore there would be great opportunities for investment when U.S. sanctions were lifted. That was certainly the attitude among some of the Jamaican businessmen, particularly those in the tourism area.

I remember trying to tell some of them, "Let's wait a bit. He's got control of all the security forces and a very strong secret police. He might survive this." However a few businessmen wanted to leap ahead with their investments in Cuba to beat the competition and did so. Here we are 20 years later, and Castro is still alive, if not in power, and his authoritarian regime continues on.

I got to visit Guantanamo Bay during my tour there. The Cuban employees gradually phased out of Guantanamo Bay. The U.S. military replaced them with workers from other neighboring countries, and Jamaica was one of them. There were several thousand Jamaicans working in Guantanamo Bay. I went over for Jamaican Labor Day when they had a celebration for the Jamaican workers. In the process, I got a tour of the base. We spent about two days there, saw what life was like on Guantanamo Bay.

It seemed less attractive than I thought it might me. It's a bleak and rather arid area. It's in the rain shadow of some mountains and gets relatively little rainfall. Even the beaches are rocky there. It's not a sailor's paradise by any stretch of the imagination, but it was interesting to see.

Let me say one thing about the Jamaican economy that I should have talked about before. There is a very big divide in income levels in the Jamaican economy. There is a very large low income group which is a least two-thirds of the country. There is a fairly small high income group, maybe 10% or less at the top. There was also a rather small middle class which was shrinking during the period I was there. This situation is far from unique to Jamaica but it was and is a major problem in the country. Most of the economic reform programs that we and the IMF supported tended to hit on the low and middle income poor sections of the population more than the upper levels.

One of the results was there was a very high crime rate in the city of Kingston itself. It was a bad sort of crime in that it was violent. A lot of the criminals had guns. That was one of the reasons we had a hardship differential there. The typical mode was that armed robbers would attack a house and often not leave any witnesses. Many people were killed that way and houses in the better areas of the city were particular targets.

During the period I was there, we actually had armed guards on the homes of the American officers or, if they were in a compound, there would be a guard on the gate. Because I had a separate house, I had an armed guard, a gate, and there were grills all over the house.

I had been in a lot of third world posts, some rather dangerous. Thus the crime problem in Kingston did not shock me too much. On the other hand, I did not have a family there either. My kids came down to visit occasionally but were not there regularly. The crime was less acute up on the north coast which is where the main hotels and tourism were. Tourists didn't experience it to the degree we did in Kingston although there were occasional problems even on the north coast.

Q: Was it a good sized embassy?

ROSSI: Yes, a large embassy for the size of the country. We had a large AID mission there and several other agencies were present.

Q: Today is August 3, 2007. This is Peter Eicher continuing the interview with Herman Rossi. This is tape number 4A. Herman, you were talking about the size of the embassy in Jamaica.

ROSSI: The embassy in Kingston was bigger than you might expect for the size of the country. I think it was a legacy of the Caribbean Basin Initiative plus the obvious fact it is so close to the U.S. and there was a broad spectrum of US interests there. There was also the feeling that the U.S. needed to support the Caribbean economies or they would be subverted by Cuba. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, this threat seemed to have become less acute because Cuba was not getting the kind of the support it had before.

After I left in '92, the embassy was cut back somewhat because the rationale for this heavy effort in Jamaica was less. We had a good size AID mission. We had DEA office. We had a good sized USIA operation there and an agricultural attachï¿½ I believe. There was also a large consular section since many Jamaicans wanted to get to the U.S. and visa fraud was a significant problem Also the many American tourists were often getting sick, having traffic accidents, and even dying. All this required Embassy staff.

Q: This is very interesting what you said suggests that as the Cold War ended, we were scaling back, and so perhaps the Caribbean nations suffered somewhat by the end of the Cold War?

ROSSI: I think they probably did in terms of US assistance. I'm do not think that at any point the U.S. government stood up and said, "The Cold War is over, so we can do less in the Caribbean," but the area gradually assumed a lower priority for assistance and attention. Other areas came more to the fore than the Caribbean particularly after I left. I think in large measure this was due to a reduction of the perceived threat from Cuban influence in these countries; without Soviet support Cuba could not undertake nearly as much subversion as before.. Most of these countries had somewhat fragile democratic systems. Jamaica was and is a rough-and-ready democracy. The elections would get a little violent, but as far as anyone could tell, the man who won was normally the guy that got the most votes which is not true of many other countries. [laughter]

Q: Did you get a lot of high level attention from Washington?

ROSSI: Not like we had had before. Dan Quayle visited while he was Vice President. I was rather impressed with him. He's gotten a lot of bad press, but in dealing with him during the visit, I found him to be a solid, sensible individual.

I think the Secretary of State came, his name is out of my head at this point.

Q: Jim Baker probably.

There had been a big hurricane, Gilbert, which had swept through the islands about nine months before I got there. They were still recovering from that storm, and the U.S. had come forward and greatly helped the island of Jamaica on recovery. In the period right after the storm, we had sent down repair crews to restring the power lines, telephone lines, and gave them continuing aid to help recover from it. It earned the U.S. a lot of goodwill.

My tour in Jamaica was mid '89 to mid '92, I left in mid '92 and went back to the department and took a job in the CIP (Communication Information Policy) bureau. It was a very small, specialized bureau in State that dealt with telecommunications issues all the way from frequency negotiations to broader issues of state control of telecommunications. There's a whole series of international organizations that have been set up to deal with various aspects of these issues all of which we were members of. Some people in the bureau had to attend at lot of international meetings.

It's a specialized field. The CIP bureau has since been merged back into theEB-Economic and Business-bureau, so it no longer exists. In years earlier a decision made that telecommunication was important enough that it needed an assistant secretary level head to deal with other countries when negotiations that were going on. Later on in the late '90s this was reversed.

There was a political appointee as head of the bureau and as far as I could tell all the assistant secretaries of CIP had been political appointees. These were rather technical fields so I spent much of my year there learning the turf. I'd dealt with broad policy and communications issues, but these were more specialized issues.

One of the things in the back of my mind when I went there was the possibility of a mandatory retirement looming on the horizon. Thus I thought it would be helpful to pick up some knowledge in the telecommunication field which would help me in a second career.

Q: Just for an example, what would you have been involved in? Do you remember the country?

ROSSI: For example, in Latin America, which was the area I was dealing with, a number of countries were privatizing their government-controlled telephone and telecommunications companies. There were opportunities for American companies to buy these systems or buy parts of them in cooperation with local companies. There were a lot of American companies interested in this. These privatization programs were not always straight forward procedures but moved in fits and starts with a certain amount of wheeling-dealing behind the scenes so it was important for American companies to stay on top of the situation.

There were a whole group of law firms in Washington, I discovered, that specialized in providing expertise to the U.S. companies on Latin American telecom issues, and these firms would very closely follow these issues. Occasionally we would have briefing sessions on particular Latin American telecom issues, and most of the attendees would be people from all these law firms.

I spent some time trying to negotiate a bilateral telecom investment agreement with Brazil. The U.S. companies operating in Brazil wanted this because the Brazilian legal system was such that it was easier for foreign companies to invest and generally do business if there was a framework agreement in place. European countries had negotiated these with Brazil, and their companies seemed to gain some advantages as a result.

I spent much of my year trying to negotiate this agreement. It was an interesting experience to me because the procedures in the U.S. government to negotiate a treaty or agreement are rather complex. If you're done it many times, it's old hat but this was my first shot at it.

The agreement when I left the office had been approved in draft, and pretty much everyone-the U.S. government agencies and the Brazilian government-was on board and it was ready to go forward. No one seemed to have any objection to the specifics of the agreement. I was told later that the STR-Special Trade Representative-withdrew its clearance for the agreement, not because of anything in the agreement, but because they had disputes with the Brazilians in other areas. The problem was that the agreement was mainly of benefit to American companies. This occurred after I left the office, so in fairness to USTR, I don't have first-hand information on this.

Q: Did you spend a lot of time in Brazil during these negotiations?

ROSSI: No, I didn't. The Embassy handled the negotiations and because the agreement was rather general, it was not that hard to negotiate. My office had planned to send a telecommunications investment mission to Brazil which I would have organized and helped lead but the Brazilian government was rocked by some scandals, and the Embassy postponed it.

Q: I presume American policy at this time was to favor the privatization that was going on in Latin America?

ROSSI: Yes, very much so, and we tried to help American companies in this competition just as the European governments were helping their companies. This was the period when cell phones were just coming to the fore. This was revolutionizing telecommunications in Latin America-telephone service-because in many of these countries you could wait months and sometimes years for a regular phone hookup. The government communications entities had often not spent the money to build up the telecom infrastructure. This was one of the arguments for privatization.

The cell phone thing was a breakthrough because now people could get instant telephone service instead of waiting for years. Thus American companies were also competing for the rights to set up cell phone systems in Latin America. Of course, they had to do so under whatever framework the local government set up. We were trying to encourage the Latin American governments to set up a framework that would allow American investors to compete fairly.

Q: Did the state department have experts in this field, or was it like you, most of the people in the office doing just one a tour in the bureau?.

ROSSI: We had within the CIP bureau a number of civil service people who were the technical experts in the various fields. They had been working in the bureau for years and were very knowledgeable on the technical issues. They were a good resource for me to draw upon because I did not bring much technical knowledge on telecommunications to the job. There were probably 15-20 of them in the bureau.

Q: The assistant secretary was experienced in this?

ROSSI: Somewhat. He was a political appointee.

Q: Do you remember his name?

ROSSI: No, I don't. He traveled quite a bit. He did have some telecommunications background I believe. I had other preoccupations because midway through the year I was told that I was going to have to retire at the end of that year-this was '93-for time-in-class because I had not been promoted into the senior foreign service.

One item I should have mentioned on Jamaica: When I took the job in Jamaica, it was mainly for personal reasons, being closer to the kids and for financial reasons. After I got there, I discovered it was not a very career enhancing post. Almost no one had been promoted into the senior Foreign Service from Jamaica. The previous three economic counselors had not been promoted. Apparently, when the promotion boards saw Jamaica on the OER form, their eyes would glaze over. Anyway, I did not get promoted. So I retired the end of '93.

I was at odds and ends for about a year, did some consulting, a little teaching of English as a Second Language. I had planned on making a major effort to build a second career such as in telecommunications but I was having trouble getting motivated. I think I had some reasonable qualifications, but it was taking me a while to make the adjustment to the end of my FS career, and, in retrospect, I think I was a little demoralized by it all.

Q: Before you go on into what you did next, how you found the transition, the state department's assistance to you in a transition to retirement. Did you have a retirement seminar and a job search program? What was the procedure at that time?

ROSSI: I did go through the retirement seminar and the job search program. I thought they were very well done. They brought in very good people. Most of us had been working in state for 27 to 30 years, so we were out of practice of looking for a job to say the least. They understood that and brought in people who could help us in the job search. None of us had written a resume in most cases in a long, long, long time.

I thought the program was well done. They tried to steel us for the psychological impact of retirement and talk about it, all of which was quite useful. There was indeed a major psychological impact of retirement. I was still in my early 50s, and I didn't consider myself ready to retire. Thus it was something of a shock even though I could see it coming.

Q: This was a period of several months that they gave you?

ROSSI: At that point, they gave us three months. The lectures etc. were over in two months. The last month you were left on your own to go do a job search and start sending out resumes. They gave you office facilities and advice if you wanted it.

I thought it was a useful program. I probably didn't use it as well and fully as I could have. Certainly they gave us the tools for a full-scale serious job search. I think the program was good, and they made a very good effort and equipped us as well as could be expected to go out and compete for jobs in the private sector.

Q: You said you did a little bit of consulting right away. What was that?

ROSSI: There was a group of former FSO's that I think is still around. I worked with them. They would provide people for various companies doing overseas projects. I didn't make much money, but we did a lot of planning. I was going to lead a group going to Liberia to evaluate prospects for restarting the rubber plantations there after the civil war. After a lot of time and planning, that fell through late in the game.

By this stage most of my children were out of college, so I was not under heavy pressure financially. If I'd been under more financial pressure, I probably would have been more motivated to go out and hit the streets for a serious second career.

When I retired, I had signed up to work as a WAE (re-employed retiree) in the State Dept's declassification program. I got the appointment, but for the first year after I retired, I didn't get any work. The second year-'95-they called me in, so I went to work on the declassification program. This was the systematic declassification program which means the older (over 25 years) documents that were going to be released under executive order, but had to be reviewed to see if any were still sensitive.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about that because I think that's interesting. That's something that a lot of foreign service people have done in retirement, and I'm not sure they have very ,many interviews about it. You said it's the general declassification program.

ROSSI: There are two categories under the broad declassification category. One is the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) program. If someone files a FOIA request for a classified document, the FOIA office will search out the document and decide if it can be released or if only parts of it can be released. This is generally more recent documents usually, but not always, produced in the last five years or so.

There is a group in the overall declassification office that deals with FOIA requests. Each request takes a fair amount of time because in many cases you have to check with the desk and, because it's more recent information, it's usually more sensitive. They generally have a backlog at any given time. The way the law has been set up, they're supposed to complete requests these in a very limited amount of time which generally is not enough to do a proper investigation.

I did not work on that side. The overall office handling the declassification programs is IPS and is located in the "A" bureau. I worked on the systematic review which is the older documents. It was about the time that I went to work there that an Executive Order came out saying that any document that is over 25 years will be automatically released if it is not otherwise exempted from release. Faced with this deadline, State and other agencies started throwing more resources into the systematic review than they had before.

Q: This would have been the beginning of the Clinton years? Was it a Clinton executive order?

ROSSI: Yes, exactly. Since Clinton was a democrat, the academic community had a certain amount of influence with his administration, and the academics very much wanted to see more State documents released. State, from their point of view, has the most interesting classified documents compared to other agencies. They put pressure on the Clinton administration which in turn issued an Executive Order. Previously release had been after 30 years and there was still not automatic release. The E.O. brought it down to 25 years and said this stuff would be released automatically. The E.O. put the onus on agency holding the documents to either release them or exempt each individual document (and give the grounds for that decision). The agencies could no longer say, "We're not releasing this because we haven't had time to screen it."

Q: There must have been millions of documents that had to be reviewed.

ROSSI: There were! It's been steady work for me since 1995. It's been about 16 years that I have worked there. Let me make this point: this is not a full time job. When you take this job, you're called a WAE, a special category State employee which has all sorts of restrictions attached to it. There are restrictions on how much you can work and how much money you can make in a year. The net result is that the most we can work is half time, and many years the program did not have enough money for us to work much more than a third of the time.

The first few years I still had the general intention of going out and starting a second fulltime career. However the problem with part-time work, I discovered, is that it's addictive. After you've done it for a few years, you really don't want to go out and fight for a full time job if you do not have to!

The other benefit is that I work was a congenial group who were pretty much all retired Foreign Service officers. We had common interests and would discuss current foreign affairs. We also pooled our knowledge of the documents we were encountering in the boxes. When we had a document we were uncertain about, we would take it around to other reviewers and discuss it with them. When we would find a difficult issue on a country that we had not served in, we would find a reviewer who had served in that country or that immediate area and had more knowledge about whether it was still sensitive. After many years of reading reports from Embassies all over the world, I discovered that I was building up a knowledge of foreign policy issues in regions I had never served in

I came to like declassification work. I had always enjoyed history and the material we worked on is in effect recent history. I think I developed some expertise on it because I was eventually given the job of doing quality control of the boxes other reviewers had completed. Eventually, I was promoted to senior reviewer and given a job we laughingly call "box cop". Essentially it is a foreman's job.

Q: You started this in 1995? When you would have started, would you have begun with documents that were just 25 years old or much older?

ROSSI: Because there had been only a limited amount of work done before that, we were starting documents quite a bit older than 25 years. A lot went back to the post-World War II period, and every now and then we found some really old documents back into the 1930s and even the 1800's.

Q: Wow!

ROSSI: That was an exception. I had a consular log book from some Canadian consulate in the late 1890's or so. Generally that stuff had been reviewed before, but there was a great deal of material from the immediate post-World War II period.

In the first five to seven years I worked there, we were getting a lot of really old stuff from the late '40s and '50s. Gradually, we finished all that. We are now up the point where we are doing just material that is mostly just 25 years old. Once in a while, some office in State will find some old material in the back of a safe that they should have retired years ago, and they send it out with the more recent retired material.

We meet periodically with the academic community. There are a couple of academic committees that come in a couple of times per year to see how the declassification program is going. They have expressed great satisfaction with State's work, more so than some of the other agencies. They particularly like that we release over 90 percent of the documents we review.

When we review a box of documents, we decide what disposition is to be made with each document. Most are released, a few are referred, and fewer still are exempted from declassification. The whole box is then sent over to NARA-National Archives-in College Park and are stored over there. This facility is near the University of Maryland. It's a big, new building with a large storage facility. That's where the academics and researchers go to access these documents.

Q: That kind of thing, if you decide not to release something, it goes back into a State department vault someplace?

ROSSI: No, it goes to NARA. The whole box is accessioned to NARA, but things that we call "collars"- strips of cardboard-have been put around the exempted or referred document. When the box is ready to go on the open shelves, documents that have been collared within the box are taken out for continuing protection. The majority are referrals, but there may be some exemptions. They are taken out and placed separately. What the researcher gets is a box minus the documents that have been exempted from declassification or have pending referrals. The referral process is greatly backlogged.

Q: Referral meaning you have to check with CIA or some other agency about it?

ROSSI: Exactly. We have within our files large amounts of documents from other agencies or which contain other agencies' equity. The biggest single referral agency that we have is CIA. We have a certain amount of their documents in our files plus some material CIA wants protected even in State documents.

The next in order on referrals would be the various DOD agencies like JCS and OSD. DOE (Energy Dept) also has very wide equity claims, more so that you would expect. Then it trickles down from there, but those are the big ones.

The one issue on declassification that did get a lot of publicity involved DOE. DOE found in the late 1990'or early 2000s that some documents were being put on the NARA shelves that still had some sensitive material on nuclear weapons. They were obviously quite concerned about this. DOE went to congress and got an amendment called the Kyle-Lott Amendment, which requires the agencies to carefully go through the boxes for anything related to nuclear weapons and certify they have done so. It also set up some training courses on recognition of DOE equities. I do not believe that State was an offender on this issue; we have always been very careful on nuclear matters. However, my second hand impression is that some of the agencies had not been doing a page-by-page review of some material up to that point, and this amendment forced them to do so. DOE has become one of the strictest agencies in terms of declassification equities.

Q: When you would get a box, it would be, for example, a box of documents from the embassy in Cairo from 1964 or something like that. Would that be a typical kind of box?

ROSSI: Yes. The files would contain both outgoing and incoming cables plus internal Embassy memos and correspondence. After a few years, State offices and embassies overseas are required to retire their files and send them to Washington. After cataloging, they are put in a storage facility out in Suitland, MD. It's run by NARA, but at that point State retains ownership of the documents.

Then at 25 years these boxes are pulled out of Suitland and brought to State Annex 13 in Newington, VA where we review the boxes. After our review, they're sent to national archives at College Park and become NARA's property. We have some of our reviewers working at NARA, largely on referrals. It's only six or so now. We used to have more.

The number of State reviewers at work at any given time depends on the funding we receive. We went through a period in 2006-09 when funding was cut way back, and we were working relatively few hours. Right now (2011), funding is better but we never know what it will be like in a few months. Interestingly, we have a large backlog of work to do but the flow of funds often does not seem very closely related to the workload. Of course, the State Dept declassification program is run on a relative shoestring compared to the funding other agencies have for this purpose.

Q: Do you literally have to read the entire cable?

ROSSI: The official policy is that we're supposed to read the entire document, and we actually sign a form to that effect. An experienced reviewer can tell in the first few pages whether there is likely to be sensitive information in the document. He or she also usually develops the ability to scan pages fairly rapidly. There are certain subjects where you need to read carefully every line of every page. The responsibility is on you. If there were something on page eleven of an otherwise bland cable that should have been protected, it is your responsibility for missing it.

Q: When you decide something still is sensitive and can't be released and it goes in a separate envelope, a separate cardboard sleeve, do you say that, "Okay, this is still sensitive, and it can be released in another 10 years," say, or do you just put it aside and somebody else will have to review it again at some future stag?.

When we exempt a document, it stays in the box with a collar around it which identifies the grounds on which it is being held (from the E.O.) and a new declassification date. This information is also entered in a computer data bank so we know when these documents will be coming up for release. (They will be at NARA by then.) There are a few special categories of documents which we actually pull out of the boxes. These include restricted data, SCI and a few others.

The reviewer will put down a year when he believes the document can be released. The farthest out we can go is 50 years from the date of the document.

We have agreements with a number of countries like Britain, Australia, and Canada that we will protect their documents for 30 years which is their standard system. We have a certain number of classified documents from these countries in our files. If we hit one of those, we exempt it for 30 years from the date of the document which will coincide with the British declassification program.

Q: That's interesting, too. We would actually end up releasing their documents...

ROSSI: There are certain subjects the British have indicated they want to be held beyond 30 years and we try to respect that. Sometimes we must put ourselves in the role of a British reviewer.

Q: Today is August 3. This is Peter Eicher continuing the interview of Herman Rossi on Tape 4B. We were talking about declassification. Herman, there's one more question I wanted to ask you on this which occurred to me whether you deal with the Historian's office in this process.

ROSSI: My office does not regularly deal with the Historians Office. There is a group within our overall organization that does deals with the FRUS which is the published Foreign Affairs Records of the United States. They are the more interesting State documents that have been selected by the Historian's office to be published. You've seen them in embassies. It is a bound State Dept publication. This other group of reviewers goes through the FRUS drafts to make sure that these documents do not contain information that is still sensitive. My office does not do that work,

Q: This would be a second review because somebody would have already gone through these documents before they were released?

ROSSI: Not necessarily. Many times, FRUS is ahead of our system. It depends on the foreign affairs issue. They will tend to focus on particular issues rather than doing all the documents for one year. They would cover one area like the Middle East and do several years' compilation of documents, all dealing with a particular regional crisis.

Q: Can the flow go in the other direction? For example, if you find a particularly interesting document, do you rule out, put a flag on it, and say, "Gee, the historian ought to include this in his compilation?"

ROSSI: No. In a more perfect world we would, but there is no real system or resources for that. Also the FRUS will publish all the documents on a particular foreign policy issue; one or two documents out of context would not be much help to them. The researchers at NARA do not seem to have any trouble finding the interesting stuff.

It's a funny job. Some of it is absolutely fascinating. If you hit an interesting country at an interesting time, reading the cables and the memos can be absolutely riveting. That's the saving grace of this job. Other times, the material is just as dry as dust. You read for six or seven hours and a certain amount of mental fatigue is going to set in. It's the kind of job that probably you shouldn't do eight hours straight.

There is a longer learning curve for declassification work than most people realize. It is not all judgment calls. Our specific instructions on documents we must protect or refer fill a number of large loose-leaf binders. I have observed a few new reviewers, some formerly in the senior Foreign Service, who seemed to come in with the attitude that declassification work is beneath them and does not require their full effort. They usually discover that the work is more complex and difficult than they expected.

Q: Are you the one, or the office, at least, that actually would stamp the document "declassified"?

ROSSI: Yes, although we don't actually stamp documents anymore. We used to. We now put a label on the box itself saying this whole box, except for the collared documents, has been declassified. We also put various forms in the box including one saying that we have done a Kyle-Lott check for restricted data. The procedures have changed over the 15 odd years I've been doing this.

Q: Let me ask you one more thing which is you mentioned occasionally that you find a real gem in the file so that everybody will be interested in looking at. When you're finished showing that around, you put it back in the files, or does someone keep a selection of these? Since it's declassified, can you take one home with you and show your friends what happens?

ROSSI: No, we are not supposed to take them out of the office. NARA is the official source of declassified State documents, and we cannot be a back channel. While the documents are technically declassified, NARA is one authorized to actually release them.

Once in a while we hit boxes of really fascinating stuff. In the old days, some of the senior people in the Foreign Service used to keep their own personal records in the office. Sometimes, they left them there when they retired or died, so you'd have these files with this mixture of official and personal records. About ten years ago, we got a number of boxes with the records of David Bruce, a wealthy eastern establishment Brahmin who was ambassador to several European countries in the 60s and 70s. He would mix reporting on sensitive negotiations with descriptions of his excellent dinner parties including the menu and wine list, as well as his fox hunts. It gave us a glimpse of how the "old money" lived. Ellsworth Bunker is another senior Ambassador on who left fascinating records at State. Unfortunately, the current crop of senior officers is not leaving records as interesting.

Q: Very, very interesting.

ROSSI: Before we finish, I should add one thing. I had an interesting recent break from declassification when I did some work for the Board of Examiners of the Foreign Service in 2009-10. Condoleezza Rice, who was Secretary of State in the Bush II administration, made changes to the entry system into the Foreign Service; my understanding was the goal of this was to get more minorities into the FS. There were two major changes. One was to lower the pass rate of the written exam from somewhere around the 75 percentile to 50. The other change was to establish a Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP) as a step between the written exam and the oral exam. The QEP panels, which I served on, did not see the candidates but went through all the documentation on their candidacy - their schooling, their job experience, their overseas experience and languages (if any), their written test scores, their writing sample and the examples they provided of their skills in various areas (e.g. communication, substantive knowledge, interpersonal relations, and management skills etc.) These example categories were linked to those in the OER. On the basis of the information available, the panel gave each candidate a letter score which was eventually translated into a rank ordering. The cutoff score, which decided whether the candidate would be invited to the oral exam, varied greatly depending on the cone the applicant chose. There were several QEP panels at work in any one session.

I served on four sessions of three weeks each on the QEP panels in 2009-10. It was quite interesting to see a revised Foreign Service entry system at work 45 years after I came in. These were the first years of Condoleezza Rice's new system, and it was still undergoing minor changes. We screened candidates in groups of 25, all of whom were applying to the same cone. One major point that came through was that an applicant's chances of getting through QEP to the Oral exam were greatly influenced by the cone he/she chose. The political cone was by far the hardest to enter while admin (now called management) was the least competitive. Economic, public diplomacy and consular were next in order of difficulty after political. Most of the panelists seemed to feel the average writing skills of the candidates had declined from earlier years.

My personal reaction to the new entry system was mixed. After seeing it at work, I felt the QEP panels actually did serve a useful purpose in identifying the overall stronger candidates. At the same time, I felt the pass rate of the written exam had been lowered too far and marginal applicants were getting through. To me, the written test is the one truly objective element of the entry process. Both the QEP and the oral exam panels are by their nature somewhat subjective no matter how experienced and well-intentioned the panelists. A lowering of standards that had served the Foreign Service and the country well over many, many years is not in the national interest.

Q: Anything else?

ROSSI: Not really. Since 1995, when I started work for the declassification program, my personal life has rather quieted down. With more free time, I have served several terms on my condo board of directors and been an usher at my church. I also have started skiing again. My Africa tours kept me from doing much skiing for 25 years but since my Foreign Service retirement, I have gotten back into the sport. I have been to the Alps a few times but I really prefer the Colorado high country.

My children all graduated from college, two from the Univ. of Virginia and two from Virginia Tech. In time, they all married, and I have been accumulating grandchildren. Thus far (2011), I have nine grandchildren, ranging in age from 13 to one. They are a real pleasure to be with, and I feel very fortunate. I guess that winds it up. I'm amazed we've spent three sessions talking! I thought my career was comparatively short so that we could do this in one session or so.

Q: It's a fascinating life and a lot of fascinating experiences. Let me thank you for sharing it with the oral history program. We appreciate very much your taking part.

ROSSI: Thank you for the opportunity.

End of interview